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April Dancer—U.N.C.L.E.'s beautiful and ultra-efficient agent—lands right in the middle of a THRUSH plot to throw the world's monetary system into chaos in this new adventure. With her sidekick, Mark Slate, she must unravel a tangled web of intrigue and cunning.
What is the significance of the tin dresses in Carnaby Street?
Who is the evil Dr. Karel Karadin?
What is he planning with the terrible chemical known as K.S.R.6?
Can the U.N.C.L.E. agents, in a race against the clock, save the world from a catastrophe which would lead to complete THRUSH domination?

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THE GIRL FROM U.N.C.L.E.

No 1

The Global Globules Affair

Simon Latter

Based on the exciting MGM-ARENA TV series starring Stephanie Powers and Noel Harrison

CHAPTER ONE: CHICKS IN ARMOUR

APRIL DANCER surveyed the London scene with a benign gaze—if the word benign can be applied to a lissome lovely in a Paris dress. But benign she felt. London did that to her. She loved New York; Paris had its strident claims; Berlin its efficient bustle hiding the deep scars of a quartered city. All great cities had their special effect on her. There were few she didn't know, or whose language she couldn't speak. But London made her feel benign. Especially after a grueling session in the mountains of Tibet and the hectic round up of her former enemies—THRUSH agents—in the steamy clamor of Bombay.

Now, that session was over—mission accomplished—the last loose ends tied and severed, here in London itself. "Ah yes, of course, my dear Miss Dancer," Mr. Waverly had said. "You do indeed deserve a holiday. Mr. Slate also. By all means—stay for two days in London."

"Two days!" Mark Slate had yelped. "I can't even choose the right hat in two days, let alone a whole new outfit of the right gear."

April Dancer frowned at the memory. She felt less benign, became more aware of the crowds of mods and chicks pattering past her or blocking the sidewalk as they stroked the Carnaby Street shop windows.

Mark Slate was in one of these shops, but she was damned if she'd go bolting in and out of any to find him. He should be here. Right now he should be here.

If Mark Slate said: "I'll see you seven minutes past three on top that mountain, old girl," he'd always be there. But now in his home town, London—oh no! he couldn't—least of all in his precious Carnaby Street. On the job itself—yes. But not now. Not when he was off the hook and roaming free among the latest mannie fashions.

No—her benign feeling was rapidly disappearing. She could forgive his eccentricities of dress. The impossible cut of his clothes, his passion for fancy weskits, his curly-brim hats, his "old girl", and "I say—bang on, old boy!" Because other more reliable and dependable attributes were his also. Admirable attributes. Mark Slate could kill without a qualm. Even be polite about it.... Yes, a strong ally in a weak situation.

April Dancer shut her mind to these good points in her friend Mark

Slate, U.N.C.L.E. agent, and quietly cussed him in four of the most flowery languages she knew. She glanced above the rooftops at the shimmering, revolving cone of the great Post Office Tower. In three minutes they were due to be lunching in that restaurant.

The fact that Mark Slate might not be there to pick up the tab held her for a while longer. April Dancer's meals always were made more appetizing if someone else took care of the check. Well—why not? A girl has a right to be careful in such matters.

As her gaze lowered she saw two red and white barbers' poles revolving at some speed, one on each side of the street. Strange, she thought, I'll swear they weren't moving just now! A metallic glinting movement also caught her eye as a number of girls came on to the street.

It was the land of the model chicks and the mod-gear cowboys, so there wasn't really anything strange about seeing a number of young chicks dressed in sheen-glinting "armor" dresses. And armor was the word... petals of metal with a sort of chain-mail linking around shoulders and arms. No one took much notice of them. In this swingingest part of London you had to appear way, way out for anyone ever to do this.

The man himself wasn't way, way out; yet he didn't belong. Not in Carnaby Street. He wore impeccably cut traditional clothes, white linen, dark tie, highly polished shoes, carried a hat and umbrella. An aesthetic face, high brow, a small beard. He moved quickly and smoothly along the crowded sidewalk.

April Dancer watched him pass as she stepped to a window, seeing his reflection until it passed the window level, then turned in time to see him entering the doorway from which the chicks had appeared.

Someone had said to her: "Stand in Carnaby Street for ten minutes and you'll see anyone who is anyone come by. It's that sort of place." Oh yes? Well, the only such person she had recognized was Dr. Carl Karadin, and he was neither a swinging London chick nor a way-out cowboy.

Link the improbable with the possible. Use each second of every unforgiving minute constructively and objectively. Around you, always, is the pattern. It's up to you to follow each line. The outside "you" is lovely, lissome, alluring. The inside "you" is chrome-steel, coldly glittering, probing, resilient and deadly. The mind of this girl is

that of a trained computer, its reflexes honed to searing sharpness.

April Dancer had never stood around waiting for a man. Never until now. Only that slop Slate would have the nerve to think she would. An improbable thought, as many a man had observed. Yet had she not stood here amid the Carnaby Street throngs, would she have seen Carl Karadin? She doubted if his mission was to purchase way-out weskits and other sartorial splendors. So the computer mind went whizz-click-whizz—and the first link was made.

She didn't even cuss the rain which now swept in a sudden pattering rush over the street, nor hurry to escape its dampness, so she was late in reaching shelter. Only the chicks in armor seemed unaffected by it. They continued their model-mincing perambulations through the length of the street. Little catty eyes mewed at them from doorway shelters, assessing this latest dress gimmick. One came close to April Dancer.

"So where's the sale, honey?" said April.

"Pardon me," said the chick. "There is no sale. D'you mind?" She pushed past. April knotted her knuckles and tapped lightly.

"Ouch!" the chick yelped.

April brushed rain drops from her purse.

"Real metal," she said thoughtfully. "Watch you don't turn rusty."

"Get lost!" said the chick, and teetered onwards.

At this moment Mark Slate slid around a bunched crowd.

"Frightfully sorry, old girl!" he said casually. "Desperate situation—they had to send to the warehouse for my size."

"Coffin, I hope," said April smoothly. "Or is that too much to expect?"

He laughed. "Aha! We are peeved. How dare we be kept waiting!" He swept off his feather-stacked, curly-brimmed hat. "A thousand apologies, your Royal Highness. For that I will buy you a fabulous lunch in a famous place." He waved his hat towards the gleaming Post Office Tower. "Table's booked—all is arranged."

"That hat," said April. "What is it—a bird scarer?" She didn't wait for an answer. Something else was on her mind. "Why the chicks in

armor? Publicity?"

Mark Slate shrugged powerful shoulders.

"Could be. Anything goes around here. You like?"

April Dancer surveyed her knuckles. "Real metal. But what metal?"

A metal-dressed model came close. She smiled at Mark.

"I say! I say!" White teeth flashed, charm oozed. "But what a shame to encase such loveliness in armor... Or is it?"

The girl giggled.

"For thine own safety, I expect," said Mark. "Snazzy. Real snazzy!" His hands flicked expertly. "Who makes?"

"I wouldn't know. I just wear it."

"Until when?"

She giggled again. "Five o'clock." She jerked a hand. "Down there. If you're around."

He gripped her shoulder caressingly. "Five o'clock," he said softly. She moved on.

April Dancer said: "You overdressed rat!"

Mark smiled. "A Highness's wish is a command. Metal—yes. Titanium? That's silly. But not an alloy. Not aluminum. Very light. Who'd dress a chick in titanium?" He shrugged again. "Does it matter?"

"Interesting," she said. "And not for sale... And Karadin too."

"Carl Karadin? Your doctor chum from Paris? Here?"

"My ex-professor," she corrected him. "The chicks come out. He goes in."

"It's all in your mind," said Mark, taking her arm as they walked through the crowded street. The rain had stopped. The throngs were again on the move. "You're trained to link—to associate. Why shouldn't he be here? This is a two-day break. Why pause for thought?"

She smiled. "Perhaps you're right. I'm hungry."

Mark was silent for a moment. "My traveler's checks are back at the hotel."

"So?"

"So for an hour or two—loan me enough to treat you right. I spent out in the store back there."

"And relied on clipping me?"

"Well, no—not exactly." He took something from his pocket, a colored pappy swodge. "I'd stashed these notes in another pocket. Got caught in a shower on the way here. They must have got wet. Don't see how, but there they are."

She fingered them. "They feel damp, but they'll be legal tender."

"Perhaps so, but you'd make it easier if you lent me a couple of flyers."

"Oh! All right!" She wasn't pleased. She opened her purse, probed, then stopped dead, pulled out a note clip. In it was a slim pappy wad of color. She glanced at him. "Okay—joke over. I don't know how you did it, but I am not amused."

Mark stared at her hands. "I'll be dammed..."

"You will be if you think I'm going to stand for your schoolboy tricks."

He raised a protesting hand. "So help me, April."

"Then how?" She swung around, gazing back down the street.

"The revolving restaurant on top of the Tower," she said suddenly; "do you mind going on? I'll meet you there."

"Well, there were some chaps—" he began hesitantly. "Old chums, y'know. Just a chance to swill the old noggin with them."

She glared. "Some chaps? You and half a regiment of your old R.A.F. chum-buddies! Okay—be in the bar."

"Now listen, mate." His voice lost its old-boy lilt. "This is a two-day leave. I'll be where I damn well please."

"Go!" she said urgently.

He glanced into her eyes, smiled softly.

"Gone," he said—and went swiftly into the press of traffic and disappeared.

April Dancer walked back the street, crossed over, sauntering, window-gazing. In a while the well-dressed figure came closer. She turned quickly, stumbled.

"Oh! I'm so sorry. Pardon—" She looked up, smiled gushingly. "Why—Dr. Karadin, of all people!"

He frowned slightly, anger flashing across his face; then a mask of smiling pleasure replaced it, though the eyes remained cold. He appeared to be searching his memory.

"Ah, yes! Yes, of course. Dancer, isn't it? Miss April Dancer."

She fluttered eyelashes at him. "Was I so hard to remember?"

They shook hands.

"A surprise," he said. "Such a surprise! Would I ever forget such a brilliant pupil?"

"Nor I such a brilliant master."

He bowed, smiling. "You are lovelier than ever."

"And you are more suavely elegant."

"We are a beautiful pair, are we not?" he agreed. "And you have the courage, *mon amie*, to wear a Paris dress in London's own Carnaby Street."

She laughed. "A discerning man! Does the professor need some swinging gear to replace his Savile Row custom-made elegance?"

He ignored the question. "I trust your career is fulfilling its early promise?"

She sighed a little-girl-puzzled sigh. "I sometimes wonder. I thought life was a challenge, but it's really a battle, isn't it, Dr. Karadin?"

"A succession of battles. One cannot win them all, but it is the salt and savor of life to keep trying. You are still doing research?"

"Yes—research." Well, what else would you call it right now? she thought. "And you, my friend?"

He shrugged. "I research also—it is an endless task. A success here, two failures there—so it goes." He glanced at his watch. "I am annoyed. My daughter wished me to meet her here. She is late and I am hungry. You remember my daughter, Suzanne?"

"Why, yes, of course. A lovely little girl."

"The little ones grow up. She is now very much the lady."

April laughed softly. "A swinging lady, no doubt! I too made the mistake of agreeing to meet my friend here. He has a passion for fancy vests—oh, pardon me, weskits, he calls them. And as a bribe he was taking me to lunch in that marvelous Tower."

Dr. Carl Karadin spread his hands as he exclaimed: "Let us leave them to find their own way. Be my guest, Miss Dancer. My car is at the end of the street. A table is reserved. Let us make the most of our meeting."

"How nice! Thank you, Dr. Karadin. Might I be driven around to my hotel on the way? I have to check on a call I'm expecting."

"Certainly—certainly. Direct the driver. We will wait for you."

In the New York Headquarters of U.N.C.L.E., Mr. Waverly sat puffing at his pipe and tapping one finger on the console edge.

"Foolish," he said. "So foolish." He looked up as Randy Kovac entered. "Did you raise our London contact?"

"No, sir."

"Or Mark Slate?"

"No, sir."

"Sama Paru in Paris?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Waverly put down his pipe slowly and deliberately, gazed at the ceiling and spoke softly.

"Mr. Kovac, you are an intelligent and at times overenthusiastic

student. You are aware that Miss April Dancer recently came through from London requesting certain information concerning one Dr. Carl Karadin. Also, she requested knowledge of my reports from this country concerning mysterious melting of money. We were able to inform her that Karadin was believed to be in London—which she knew—and that we have two reports of such mysterious melting of money—which has nothing to do with high prices. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did I not ask you to endeavor to raise our London agent, failing Mr. Slate or Mr. Paru, and report to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yet I had to ask three questions before obtaining the only information you were able to give me. Remember not to be so concerned with appearing to be efficient, Mr. Kovac, and concentrate on being so in fact. Now—let us begin again. Did you raise our London contact?"

Randy Kovac flushed.

"No, sir, nor Mr. Slate, but I made contact with Sama Paru in Paris. Mr. Paru reports that Dr. Karadin has not been seen in Paris for several months. He is believed to have inherited a large amount of money, or is engaged upon a lucrative research project—possibly with American backing. He is known to have visited this country during the past year, but he has spent more time in England."

"Ah! Thank you, Mr. Kovac. You see how easy it is when you try? I shall now require the exact dates of Karadin's visits to this country, the contacts he made whilst here, and a dossier on those contacts. We shall also send out a general observance alarm, and I think a brief word with the Treasury people will be in order. But I will attend to the last two details, thank you, Mr. Kovac."

Randy Kovac hurried from "the presence". He didn't find Mr. Waverly merely awe-inspiring; he just scared the hell out of Randy, whose sole ambition was to become a skilled field agent for U.N.C.L.E. At present a high-school senior, he worked at U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters for two afternoons a week, was planning to go to college and felt keenly that if only Mr. Waverly would understand that he had the makings of a brilliant agent, the future of U.N.C.L.E. would be assured.

Mr. Waverly did in fact think highly of young Kovac and knew exactly what his new member thought and how he felt. But an U.N.C.L.E.

agent has to have far more than resourcefulness and inspired guesswork. Mr. Waverly admired Randy's initiative in making opportunities for escaping from his job as messenger in Section One, or from the Map Room, to get into the more exciting departments. U.N.C.L.E. encouraged initiative in its members, but overenthusiastic juniors had to be gently curbed and carefully directed.

Randy Kovac had those failings of youth, but he also had a large amount of commonsense and knew very well that his learning had scarcely begun. This didn't prevent him from stepping outside his routine tasks whenever he could see or make the chance. He admired Napoleon Solo, held Illya Kuryakin in high esteem, and sincerely respected Mr. Waverly. But Mark Slate was a special object of reverence to him.

Mark—that brilliant "export" from London Headquarters. A Cambridge graduate with honors, ex-R.A.F. veteran, former member of the British Olympic Ski Team, expert at judo, karate, and a dead shot. Fluent in a dozen languages and yet a buccaneering gallant with unbounded zest for modern life and living. Randy Kovac had only to think of Mark Slate to know exactly how much more he had to learn.

He wasn't jealous of Mark Slate, even though his hero was April Dancer's partner. Which showed how emotionally balanced he was—for in April Dancer there dwelt all that Randy, the man, could desire in a woman. And what a woman! Young, beautiful, talented—a graduate of a good New England girls' college, daughter of service folk who had traveled with her all over the world.

Randy often sneaked into personnel files just to gaze there on the assorted pictures of lovely April and to read all he could decipher of her background. She also was fluent in a dozen languages, as expert as any man in judo and karate or with her U.N.C.L.E. gun. But her record showed that she preferred not to kill and seldom used her weapon or her knowledge of karate for any means but to save another agent's life. She constantly faced danger, yet emerged unscathed, possessing intuitive reactions as well as vast experience for one so young, and an unbreakable nerve.

Reading such a record would scare off many an admirer, but Randy knew also about April Dancer the golfer, horse rider, trap-shooter (and crap shooter as a matter of fact); the April Dancer who could fly a plane and for relaxation had beaten men drivers at their own sports car races. Yet no lady was more lovely when gowned for graceful ballet or ballroom dancing, or even the more virile dances of the frug

and the pachanga. Those were the things she did. For Randy Kovac, she would have been top of every pop by just being herself around town—but those other assets lifted her to glorious heights in his esteem.

Small wonder, then, that any official U.N.C.L.E. business involving April Dancer and Mark Slate made Randy Kovac work thrice as hard to play a more active part in the many routines and actions followed through at Headquarters.

A general assignment agent such as April Dancer usually followed direction from Headquarters, but in U.N.C.L.E.'S endless battle against the forces of destruction an agent did, at times, notice some odd pointer when in the field. Such agents' training, experience and natural resourcefulness helped them always to link the improbable with the possible. Their knowledge of world affairs helped them to recognize agents of opposing factions and leaders of groups who held views harmful to the national security, or individual scientists and others whose activities were suspect.

Mr. Waverly never laughed at such reports from his experienced and trusted agents—and of all mirth-provoking reports, this latest one from April Dancer, concerning "chicks in armor" and paper money that melted, was a beaut.

But once again that intuitive sense which all agents must have had linked together apparently absurd incidents, and in this linking set into operation the powerful undercover machine of U.N.C.L.E.

The "obbo" men and women—the passive man-in-the-street observation agents of U.N.C.L.E.—were alerted. Slowly the reports came in, were tabulated and assessed. No pattern emerged, but the pointers were there.

April Dancer had not made a joke.

CHAPTER TWO: WATCH IT - LOVER BOY!

THE powder room was obligingly empty. April Dancer jammed the door, opened her purse, extracted compact and U.N.C.L.E. communicator, manipulated both. The compact mirror became a miniature TV screen and the head and shoulders of the London H.Q. contact appeared.

"Hi, April! Fine reception."

"I'm on the Post Office Tower—couldn't have a better spot. Did you pick up the money package from my hotel?"

"Yes, working on it now. It'll take time—but preliminary check shows presence of two substances. One dissolves ink, the other works on the fibers found in banknote paper. You may be on to something."

"You bet your life I'm on to something. This could be global. Have you contacted the British Treasury?"

"Mr. Waverly and Washington have done so. There'll be no press leakage. It's classified."

"I should hope so. Just remember that's my cash—I want a refund in real money. Forty-two pounds."

He smiled gently. "We made it about thirty."

"Are you calling me a liar?"

"No, Miss Dancer. I'll send it to your hotel."

"Do that. Inform Mr. Waverly that I'm lunching with Dr. Karadin."

"Will do. Mr. Waverly suggests caution. He feels that a tail might be better at this stage."

"I'm sorry—I can't hear you."

"No." He smiled again. "I thought you couldn't. Sama Paru in Paris reports a possible money-melting incident in the Rue Rivoli but cannot confirm. Count Kazan is in Monte Carlo."

"He would be! So?"

"No money incidents, but a number of models wearing metal-type dresses have been seen. Local opinion is that they are an advertising gimmick."

Somebody turned the powder room door. April heard a woman's voice say, "It seems to be locked."

"Over and out," she said quickly. "Keep my channel open." She closed the compact and manipulated certain of the articles on her charm bracelet. "Mark Slate—hear me. I shall lunch with Karadin. Don't

interrupt but look for signal. Saw you in bar on my way through. One of your old chums—the red-haired one—looks very much like a THRUSH agent I knew of in Germany—so watch it, lover boy! Out."

She un-jammed the door, smiling sweetly at the women outside. "Oh! I'm so sorry—it sort of got itself stuck. Pardon me." She stepped around them and walked to the restaurant, passing the bar on the way.

Mark Slate, two other men and a small, vivacious girl with a large bosom and a pretty-pretty face were at a table. The girl seemed to have known Slate a long time. "At least ten minutes," April thought nastily. "So that's Suzanne Karadin! She's sure enough grown since I last saw her."

Mark Slate glanced up, saw April and raised one hand casually to his ear to signify that her message had been received through his ear radio; otherwise he made no recognition.

Dr. Karadin came forward to meet her.

"Our table is ready."

April thought—he must have seen me glance in the bar. He must know I saw Suzanne. Likewise he must know she is there, because he'd see her when he came by. A cold feather flickered in her tummy. A silly way to describe one of her inexpiable warning systems. Sometimes it happened to the nape of her neck. A serious warning feathered cold ripples up her spine. She never denied these feelings. They were like radar to her. Many people have similar signs when unseen danger threatens them. To those who live constantly with danger, this "radar" becomes a highly tuned mechanism.

"You have been here at night?" Karadin asked when he had ordered their meal. "The scene is like a fairyland city."

"My first visit." She gazed through the panoramic windows at the vista fanning out hundreds of feet below them. The day was showery, the blue sky patchworked with grey- white cloud giving good visibility as the restaurant slowly revolved.

"Over there is what you Americans call Buck House." He indicated. "Follow the line from the Nelson column in Trafalgar Square—see the Admiralty Arch, the wide avenue of The Mall, the white monument in front of Buckingham Palace—all so tiny, so neat, don't you think?"

"Yes indeed." She let him talk as she acted her part of ex-pupil. When he switched to French she answered him in that language. He played a little game by pointing out the position of various Embassies and Legations and describing them in the different languages of their countries.

April Dancer answered him in each tongue. They smiled and laughed, the suave bon vivant and the young American beauty—yet as each language was exchanged it became obvious that Dr. Carl Karadin was using words like probing rapiers. Intellect sparred with intellect, talent with talent.

"You have studied well and traveled widely," he said. "I congratulate you, my dear. I wish Suzanne had one tenth of your mental power."

She laughed. "And I wish I had one tenth of yours! Have you lived in London a long time?"

"Not very long, but I have known it for years."

"You are working over here? Don't you miss Paris?"

He shrugged. "Each city, each country has its attractions. You say you are on a touring holiday. Do you not miss New York?"

"I guess so. But working away from home is very different—it must take more adjustment. Are you still pursuing the Parsimal Theory?"

"Ah! So you remember that too! I have not wholly discounted Parsimal. His theory of moisture layers being directed and harnessed by sonic waves is palpably absurd, but his sub-theory of stratum has a potential."

"Spare me!" April Dancer giggled. "My old professor is as brilliant as ever! You are the only man I ever met whose eyes flashed when he spoke about air. What was it you told us?—the whole of creation is suspended in air? Every thought, every act, every sound is transmitted and received by air—air, the invisible, air, the unseen power, air, the giver and taker of life!"

He laughed softly. "And what did my students call me? Papa Hot-air?"

"Students are not the nicest of people." She switched subjects suddenly. "But surely your talents would be more appreciated by commercial firms? Have you not been to America?"

"Soon," he said. "Soon, I hope to go."

Oh brother! she thought. Why the cover up? After all, I'm only an ex-student, so why be coy? I know damn well you've been to America. Aloud she said: "They'd love you there."

He smiled. "You think so? I have work to finish here." He waved a hand embracing the scene below. "A mellow city, this London. A grimy city, as are many English towns. They have a big air pollution problem here. I am carrying out some research. The British have given me facilities."

"That's wonderful !" She beamed at him, then glanced up as Mark Slate and Suzanne passed on the way to their table.

Dr. Karadin gave no sign of recognition. They both started talking at once, then laughed. A waiter came.

"Excuse me, sir—Dr. Karadin?"

"Yes?"

"There is a phone call for you—if you would come this way, please."

Karadin rose, bowed slightly. "Forgive me? I left word that I would be lunching here."

She smiled. "Of course." Waited until he was across the room, then rested one hand against her head, the other hand apparently idly twiddling the charm bracelet. She lip-spoke into the micro-sender. "Hear me, Mark." She saw his hand flick casually up to his head as if smoothing the side hair. "Watch it, lover boy. The little lollapalooza is daddy's girl and I'm working on daddy. This thing is wide open. We'll have to play it by ear. Headquarters is on to it. Turn and smile acknowledgement."

Mark Slate did not at once turn, but flicked his finger over his button micro-sender. The howl nearly blew out her eardrums. Then he turned, nonchalantly surveying the restaurant, and beamed a beatific but devilish grin at her as if to say: "Don't be childish—I know what I'm doing."

April was furious. She oscillated her own sender just as Mark was raising his glass of wine and smiling into the eyes of Suzanne. The blast lifted him in his seat. The glass of wine shot in a neat spout between the well-advertised breasts. Dr. Karadin returned at that

moment, thus cutting out April's view of the fun. Karadin ignored the commotion of bustling waiters and mopping napkins at the distant table.

They ate their meal, leisurely talking and watching the panoramic views below them. Karadin pointed out landmarks, famous buildings, wittily discussed their historic associations and compared them with the more modern, changing skyline around St. Paul's and the City of London.

"As in all countries," he observed as they were served with coffee and liqueurs, "the tourist usually is drawn to tourist centers. While these are major attractions, there are many others sometimes of even greater interest. For example, Paris does not represent France any more than New York represents America, and the English countryside with its smaller towns and centuries-old villages is not truly represented by London."

"Time is restricted, I suppose," said April. "One books a tour to Europe —takes in London, Stratford-upon-Avon, some cathedral cities, then zips over to Holland to see windmills, canals and tulip fields." She spoke in the same easy, friendly, impersonal tone set by Karadin himself. But she knew this was all feed-in guff. To what, she didn't know, but her "radar" was beaming strong signals.

"The roads, of course, are difficult for the foreign driver." Dr. Karadin smiled. "They not only drive on the wrong side but in many areas the roads are so narrow and winding that one has to drive in the middle. A most disconcerting experience for many tourists."

"But surely no different from many mountain roads and other country areas in Europe?"

"True?' He nodded. "But hedge-lined roads are a particular hazard. One cannot see over the tall hedges, nor is it wise to use a very large car. It is a pity you are on a timed tour. I am sure you would find the West country of England quite fascinating. My research center is on Dartmoor—a wild and lonely place, but quietly secluded."

"It sounds ideal for research work." She rose to his thinly disguised bait. "I'm not actually booked on a tour—not with a party—just following a schedule of my own."

He smiled. "Ah! The discipline of the ordered mind! At work or play, this discipline must be applied else all is chaos. Others prefer to be disciplined by committing themselves to an organized party with its

fixed timetables and block bookings. So you can change your schedule if you wish?"

"Certainly I can." She assumed an air of embarrassment. "As a matter of fact, Dr. Karadin, I am a little bored with ordinary sight-seeing. I love to get off the beaten track. I think I'll hire a car and drive through this West country you've been telling me about."

He paused to sip his liqueur, then walked right into her trap.

"That phone call was to tell me that an important experiment of mine is about to be resolved. This means I have to drive down to the West country this afternoon. We have a large house with a number of guest rooms. I'm sure you would be enchanted"—he beamed a warm smile at her—"and so would I, if you would care to accompany me?"

She beamed right back at him, the picture of a little girl delighted.

"Oh! That would be marvelous! I don't have much to pack. What time do you leave London?"

He glanced at his watch. "In about an hour. I will pick you up at your hotel."

"That's fine. Your chauffeur knows it."

"I use the chauffeur-driven car only in London. The parking and traffic problems irritate me. I have my own car. We will leave here when you are ready, and meet later."

She watched him settle the bill from a well-filled wallet—an unusual wallet which looked like silver leather. He noticed her interest.

"A present from Morocco," he said casually. "A trifle flashy, but I like it." He stowed the wallet away, rose briskly and stood aside for her to leave ahead of him. But by using a blockage of waiters to her advantage, April made her way by a different course among the tables and so was free to give Mark Slate a swift signal message.

Mark read the message as: "I'm walking into a trap. Contact H.Q. for link" as April Dancer came towards his table. He stuck out his foot as she passed, causing her to stumble. He leapt up. "So frightfully sorry! My fault. I really should watch my big feet."

April laughed. "That makes two of us." She passed on out of the restaurant.

Mark sat down, grinning at Suzanne with a humor he didn't feel. Despite her obvious femininity, he found her extremely boring as a woman. He always did when they threw it at him in large handfuls. He'd known for some time that April Dancer made other women seem pretty drab. He'd got along fairly well in his social life without this perfection spoiling the general crop, but Suzanne—who should be, and no doubt was considered to be—a moderately lush dish, was hard work. A great strain on his natural reactions because he hardly reacted to her at all.

From the moment of meeting she'd lushed it up—not ham-like, but so forcefully that it was hard to believe she didn't really find him irresistible. Perhaps she did? You never knew with dishes. They came hot or cold, or with transparent covers or asbestos lids. Suzanne was the "open dish" type, guaranteed to give you heartburn from an overdose of uncooked protein served in rich malarkey sauce.

Ginger Coke had introduced them in the bar, where Mark and Jeff Hale, now a Ministry wallah, were sinking a quiet noggin. He'd flown with Jeff in the old days. There'd been four of them—four hell-raisers. Stan and Jack Dill, the hell up twins, crashed in a big way and went out—zppt! Ginger had been a replacement pilot. A good enough lad, but not from the same stable as the twins.

When Ginger and Suzanne joined them, Ginger made it very clear that he didn't know the girl very well. "Only met once at some party, old boy—glided into each other at the entrance." This was strange talk from Ginger. In the old days, Ginger latched on to any passable female, whether he'd met her once or many times. Yet now he worked hard to explain that Suzanne was virtually unescorted, while Suzanne behaved as if she had come to the Tower especially to meet Mark Slate. Jeff watched them with an amused and tolerant gaze, occasionally flicking a questioning eyebrow at Mark. Ginger insisted on loading them up, saying he had a lunch appointment elsewhere, but why waste good drinking time with old chums?

They had reached the stage of, "I say, d'you remember that buzz-around in Malaysia... and whatever happened to old Blanco White?" Suzanne played footsie, eyesie and why-not-take-all-of-me with Mark, who didn't react helpfully until he received April's call. After that he had returned footsie, handsie, where-have-you-been-all-my-life with such gusto that Jeff had said coldly: "You know where to contact me when you're free. So long, Mark!" Ginger jumped in with a "Aw, hell!

Is that the time? I'll ride down with you, Jeff. Cheerio, you two—see you around!"

Mark hinted that he'd been stood-up on his lunch date; Suzanne hinted that this had happened to her, too, but neither gave details. Mark had in fact been stood-up by April, whose company he would have preferred. It wasn't this that irritated him so much as the knowledge that all of a sudden she had zoomed him into work again when he'd laid on the perfect evening, following what he'd hoped would be a softening-up lunch.

To be off duty with April was a rare event. Too rare to pass-up. He cursed her womanly intuition, her keen observance, her all-consuming career ambitions—or whatever had launched her suddenly onto this new case. He'd wanted to show her off to Jeff, who would certainly appreciate a woman like April Dancer. Now, all he now had was this monstrously coy little sex-pot, and was forced to switch his mind from personal to impersonal reactions. On U.N.C.L.E. business the job came first and last—and in the middle.

The message from April at the table helped him to understand Suzanne's behavior, so what had been a personal bore now became an impersonal chore—all part of the job. But he couldn't resist giving April a blast on his micro-sender just to let her know how he felt. He hadn't been quick enough to switch out the circuit before she herself had slammed an oscillation right back at him, causing him to shoot his wine over Suzanne's frontal armory.

Even this seemed to please her.

"You will have to take me home to change my dress, you naughty man!" She giggled. "You will like that, no?"

Instead of replying: "Oh Gawd! No thanks, mate!" as he felt, he said: "Sure am glad I'm clumsy. Gosh, I thought you'd be furious."

"How could I be—wis *you*?"

He almost groaned aloud at the corn she was handing him, but at last he knew this had been her objective. Where was home?—and what else besides a new dress would be waiting for them? The exchange of signals with April put him back in the duty groove. The anticipation of action was compensation enough.

April Dancer had taken Mark's swodge of paper money, leaving him with some small change. She'd conveniently forgotten to lend him the

two five-pound notes he had requested and as Jeff and Ginger had bought drinks, he'd forgotten his lack of cash. He searched his pockets, while Suzanne watched him.

"I think perhaps you have left all your money at your hotel," she said. She opened her purse, extracted notes from a shiny silvery wallet and passed them under the table.

"How very understanding of you! I'll stop off at my hotel and pick up some traveler's checks."

"No," she spoke sharply, then added quickly: "Oh no—you must not think of it." She angled her cleavage his way. "I cannot bear these damp clothes any longer. I must go straight home and change." She gave a little girl pout. "You promised."

"So did you," he said meaningfully.

"Ah!" She wagged a finger. "We shall see, eh?'

Mark settled the bill, grinning to himself as he thought of April's reluctance to be accommodating with money. The day she willingly and cheerfully picked up the tab had yet to dawn. He felt it would be a long, long night to that particular dawn. His loyalty to April Dancer was unbounded, but if pressed he would have to admit that whilst he'd never met another woman so talented, courageous and beautiful, he also had never met one so mean with money.

They taxied to the Regent's Park area of London. The house was the end one in a row of graceful porticoed Nash houses. The exterior was as gracious as the day it had been built, but the interior obviously had been modernized with no regard to expense.

She led the way to a door at the rear of the hail.

"You will be comfortable here," she said. "I will not be long." She opened the door and stood aside.

It was a lush room, all green leather furniture, gold and ivory walls, grass-green carpet, tapestry curtains, an executive desk with green glass table, topped with phones of cream and green. He didn't have time to observe more before the door closed. He turned at the sound and stared down into the black round eye of the gun which was aimed at his heart.

"You heard the lady," said Ginger Coke. "Take a seat, chum, and make

yourself comfortable."

CHAPTER THREE: WHERE BIRDS CAN FLY

SAMA PARU daily blessed U.N.C.L.E. He was a French citizen, son of an Armenian mother, a Turkish father, grandson of an Hungarian circus performer who married an Italian high-wire artiste. With such a family it was natural that Sama's childhood should be spent traveling back and forth through Europe, natural too that he should like freedom and excitement. He came to U.N.C.L.E. via Morocco and certain Middle East espionage rings. Sama Paru cherished the aims of U.N.C.L.E., having spent hard years proving his worth before being appointed a European Field Contact man.

Count Kazan, his partner, had an entirely different back ground. He always had known wealth and luxury, yet instead of engaging himself in the social life of his generation or, as did so many of his contemporaries, entering politics, he sought an outlet for his fierce ambitions to see the world free of tyranny, war and injustice. He was an idealist, but years of training had matured this idealism into more purposeful and practical channels. He became an expert in International Law, a skilled pilot, an expert in codes and in physical sports. He used these skills also as social assets, for part of his U.N.C.L.E. work was to maintain contact with the upper echelons of society. Indeed, he blessed U.N.C.L.E. for having given his life a decided purpose.

They worked well together, these two men from such different backgrounds. Neither of them wanted personal power, though both could have achieved it. They were, in fact, internationals rather than Europeans, and their work with U.N.C.L.E. gave them the satisfaction of world service rather than that of local service to some local cause.

Seeing them together one was reminded of two of the famous Musketeers, Count Kazan being D'Artagnan to Sama Paru's Porthos. Yet they were seldom seen together in social life. When called to work together on an U.N.C.L.E. assignment they adopted such roles as Kazan the wealthy master to Paru the chauffeur or manservant, mechanic or gardener. Sama Paru slipped easily into any such role; Count Kazan did not, although he was expert at disguise. But usually he remained himself and, having no experience of hardship nor the usual necessity for working to earn a precarious living, could not easily assume working-class roles.

Sama Paru was alone in his Paris apartment when Count Kazan called him up.

"You are alone, Sama?"

"I am."

"That is hard to believe. Where is Colette? Or is it Trudy, the little American? Or perhaps Sofia, the Italian? I confess I cannot keep pace with your amours."

"Alone, I said," Sama growled. "And why should I care whether or not you can count?"

"Been caught in any good rain showers lately?"

"You should call me on emergency channel to ask me that?"

"Tut! Tut!" said Kazan. "Paris always makes you so touchy. Now me—I am full of sunshine, sitting on top of a mountain way, way to the south of you, watching the sky."

"A pleasant occupation."

"April Dancer is in London."

"So is Mark Slate. Happy sky watching. Over and out."

"'Wait!"

"So?"

"So what makes it rain?"

"In parts of Ireland they say it is the little people."

"In other places it could be big people."

"Try the Hopi Indians—they have a reputation as rain makers. Is this connected with that Rue Rivoli report I sent to New York?"

"What did you think of it?" Kazan asked.

"On reports, I give the facts that are required. When Mr. Waverly requests my opinion, he asks for it. The facts were that there was a shower of rain and there were some people who claimed their money melted. I do not have enough spare cash to leave around in the rain,

but if I did, I would expect it to get wet."

"What do you, personally, know of Dr. Carl Karadin?"

Sama Paru frowned at the ceiling. "One of those Left Bank professors in his younger days. Later, a frustrated research scientist with some pretty wild theories. An admirer of Parsimal, though he quarreled with Parsimal's theories. Became a nutcase—very clever, many talents, but too diversified. He faded out of the Paris scene—oh, three years ago. Married, parted—one daughter. I heard he inherited money. Retired to carry out his own research. I couldn't prove that, though." Sama paused. "Wait now—there was something."

"Political?" Kazan suggested.

"Not really. It was in keeping with his role as a nutcase. He wanted to replace world currency with the French franc. Or did he want a world currency to replace the franc? Some such gibberish. Well, goodbye now. Don't take too much sun."

"London office reports April Dancer and Dr. Karadin heading to west of England in a helicopter. Mark Slate engaged with Karadin's daughter in London."

"And you are sitting on a mountain."

"I've got a helicopter too." Kazan spoke slowly and clearly. "There is a point on the French coast—Omonvile, in the Department of Manche. Get yourself a helicopter. Omonvile is opposite the English south-west, a few miles from Cherbourg."

"It is, more exactly, opposite Bournemouth, which is on the English south coast," said Sama coldly. "They have four tides a day and the sands are quite clean. We could nip over for a paddle. Or have you a more exciting suggestion?"

"There could be birds on the wing. If you brought your bird-watching outfit we might see the lesser thrush."

"Or even the greater thrush?" Sama Paru's eyes gleamed at the mention of the word.

"What else is in south-west England?"

"Traffic jams," said Sama. "On the roads, of course. Or what they call roads over there. I once went to Gilhooley, the space satellite relay

station."

"Ah!" said Kazan. "Interesting. There also is Dartmoor."

"A very nasty prison."

"And a wild moorland?"

"Where birds can fly in freedom and remain hidden if they wish. The thrush is often a sky bird."

"Exactly," said Kazan.

"Exactly where?"

"That depends on our bird-watching skills."

"I will load all necessary equipment." Sama Paru ceased his bantering tone as he asked: "Is this a directive?"

"No—a request. There appears to be a deal of guessing going on at the moment. Our charming April is allowing herself to be used as bait."

"I would not care to be the fisherman who caught her. I do not know of a fishing line strong enough to hold a tiger."

"At Omonville," said Kazan. "Yes?"

"But yes!" said Sama Paru. "I leave within the hour. You have had to hire a chopper—couldn't you wait for our Paris-based U.N.C.L.E. machine?"

"No. Two choppers were requested. I shall fly it so there will be no strangers aboard. *Au 'voir, mon vieux!*"

CHAPTER FOUR: CHOPPERS AWAY

DR. KARADIN almost caught her out with his sudden change of plan. Fortunately, just as she was leaving her hotel room she made a last contact with London Headquarters to report that she was on her way.

"You told me not to call you," said the London link man, "but just after you reported in, we received information that Karadin seldom drives to the west. He picks up a helicopter outside London, flies to Exeter and takes his car from there. New York is a little annoyed. We cannot

raise Mark Slate, and Mr. Waverly considers you are taking an undue risk."

"Tell him it's a matter of comparison," said April. "All risk is undue—if you see what I mean?"

The link man grinned. "I do, but will he?"

"That's up to you," said April, smiling sweetly. "But if you say it the wrong way—I'll have your guts for garters. Over and out."

In the hotel lobby Dr. Karadin, who had changed into country tweeds which gave him a chunky and less suave appearance, said cheerfully: "I have decided to use the helicopter. The roads are very crowded and I am anxious to reach the west country as soon as possible. You do not mind?"

April contrived to look surprised. "My! But you must be an important man around here! Your own helicopter service!"

He smiled. "A small matter of effective organization. The chauffeur-driven car is parked around the corner from the hotel. I will join you in a moment." As she left he was heading towards the toilets.

Through an angled mirror Karadin saw April Dancer leave the hotel. He at once changed direction and went past the curving reception desk into a small corridor. He leaned through an open window to where the hotel telephonist sat at the switchboard and passed her a slim fold of money.

"The lady made no calls," said the girl, pushing the money under a phone pad. "Nor did she receive any."

"Good," said Karadin. "And Slate?"

"No messages either in or out. He hasn't returned to his room since he left this morning."

"You will phone my London number should any calls for either be received?"

The girl tapped the phone pad, smiling. "As long as this lasts."

"You are being overpaid," Karadin snapped.

The girl shrugged. "That's a matter of opinion. You'll get your money's worth."

"Pah!" snarled Karadin as he hurried away.

As a journey to benefit a tourist, it was a dead loss. The car whizzed through the dense traffic of Knightsbridge, Kensington and Chiswick, occasionally darting along side streets to escape jams, so all that April Dancer saw were rows of parked cars, grubby houses and fume-belching red buses.

"Good grief!" she exclaimed. "How do they ever sort out this tangle on these horse and buggy roads? Why don't they have a heliport in central London?"

"They have," said Karadin. "But as yet we have not succeeded in filing up enough forms to defeat the red tape which binds private operators. So we cannot use it. We have not long acquired permits to land a helicopter near our house on the moors. I have to fly to Exeter and drive by road from there."

They chatted about the ways of bureaucrats in various countries and the difficulties of filling forms and obtaining permits and licenses. April Dancer purposely kept the conversation at this inane level. In some ways it was a natural conversation for a tourist, but with her usual insight she had detected a change in Karadin. He too had been acting a part and, if her own hunch was correct, had many more important things on his mind right now than the subject they were discussing.

There is nothing so infuriating as having to listen to a constant flow of trivial chatter when one is trying to assess the dangers, difficulties and other aspects of a problem. She had forced herself upon Karadin after that lightning hunch hit her, leaving him only two courses to follow. To exchange pleasantries, give a brief explanation of why he was in town and leave her; or to stick with her until he'd made certain she really was a holiday tourist. What else could he think she was?—and why? If any other thought entered his head, then he'd proved her hunch to be correct. Slightly illogical reasoning, but then, for all her talents and efficiency as an U.N.C.L.E. agent, April Dancer was still a woman. Which was why Mr. Waverly often gave her a latitude he would not allow the men. She had a flair for being right before logic could prove her to be.

By the time they had almost reached London Airport it was obvious that her companion was becoming edgy. The car took a side road, then drove along a track which led to a small field where a helicopter was parked. The chauffeur took her overnight bag and Karadin's

luggage. The pilot stowed them away. In less than five minutes they were airborne. April began chatting again.

"Please," said Dr. Karadin, raising a protesting hand. "Please do be silent for just a little while. I have a severe headache."

"Oh dear, I *am* sorry," April gushed. "Now you just lean back in your seat and I'll look out of the window. Have you been overworking? Yes, you do look kind of tired. I had an uncle once who suffered from headaches. Nearly drove him mad. But he had a wonderful cure... ." She giggled and launched into a long and impossible explanation.

This was a weapon not issued to U.N.C.L.E. agents—the weapon of the female mind linked to the female tongue. Stronger men than Karadin have taken to their heels to escape it; in the close quarters of a helicopter there was no escape from the strident, high-pitched voice April Dancer purposely adopted. It even got on the pilot's nerves, for he kept stabbing venomous glances in her direction.

Nor did surveying the patchwork-quilt panorama of south-west England make her silent, because soon after take-off they ran into heavy rain and low cloud so that she couldn't see much anyway. So she jabbered on and on, hoping her voice wouldn't crack under the strain. Karadin cracked first.

"Blast you, woman!" he yelled. "Will you keep quiet?"

"Well, really!" April screeched indignantly. "I don't call that very polite. Fancy speaking to your guest like that! After all, you invited me to see your precious West country and this house on the moors. You know, I always did think you were too good to be true—now listen to me, Professor. I guess you've been out of this world too long. Women have rights now, you know... ." And off she was again, in a long tirade.

At last Karadin reached for the first-aid kit, turning away from her to open it.

"That's right," she said. "You take a handful of aspirins. They'll settle your nerves."

"My God!" Karadin exclaimed. "I'll settle yours!" He whirled in his seat, a Beretta automatic pointing at her navel. "Keep still," he said huskily. "Very still or I'll blow a hole right through you." He moved swiftly and slapped a piece of sticking tape over her lips. When she brought her hand up he slashed the gun across her knuckles, grabbed her hand,

forced it down and lashed it to a seat strut with more tape.

April could have taken him then by one swift action, but this outcome was what she had wanted. She'd been prepared to have to wait until they reached the house, but when she guessed he was under strain she hoped he'd be forced to make his first move.

Karadin leaned back in his seat. "Okay," he said to the pilot. "Radio ahead for the car and two attendants. Use the code."

He turned to April Dancer. She glared at him, still maintaining her role of outraged innocence.

"U.N.C.L.E. made a mistake in sending you to London," he told her. "You are a little too famous to be ignored. I did not want to be bothered with you, but once you had made contact with me I had to take you out of circulation. I don't know whether you are a very foolish or brave young woman to make yourself so obvious. There were other means available to me, but I could not take them. We Europeans are still rather hidebound by tradition. We cannot truly accept that a woman who does a man's job should also take the same risks." He shrugged. "And anyway, violence against a woman always attracts more attention. For that, you should be thankful."

April mouthed stifled words. "What are you going to do with me?" she managed at last to say.

He shrugged again. "That is not really my department. You may get hurt. You may not. That will depend on you. My friends will want you to talk..." He smiled nastily. "That is a pleasure to which they are welcome. I don't care if I never hear your voice again. It will be a long time before you are found—if ever."

Mark Slate surveyed the gun, then grinned at Ginger Coke.

"This isn't very chummy, old boy."

"My pleasure, mate," said Ginger. "I hope you force me to squeeze the trigger."

"Charming of you. That means you have orders not to shoot unless forced to."

"Don't get ideas. You'll be dead soon enough, but you've some talking to do first."

"To you?"

"I'll be there. I've waited a long time, my old Mark—a long time. I never fitted, did I? Not with you or Jeff, or any of the other"—he sneered—"*old boys*. Not Ginger Coke—not really one of us, old man. Oh yes, mate, I volunteered to set you up as soon as we knew you were in London."

"*You* did?" Mark laughed. "I thought that was the sex pot's job. Will she claim the lunch on her expenses?" He saw the fury flood into Ginger's eyes. "Who is she, Ginger?—one of those French bints who're out of work now the blue film racket is a bust? But you always went for the easy ones, didn't you? Remember that bint in Germany? And the one in Kuala Lumpar? None of us would touch 'em with a barge pole, but our Ginger did—didn't you, chum?" He saw the knuckle whiten and the gun quiver. "What are you around here, besides being a one-gun hero—the prize stallion?"

The quiver became a jerk as Coke fought for control—a jerk big enough to deflect the gun from its vital target. In that split second Mark Slate moved—silent, swift.

The first blow paralyzed Ginger Coke's gun hand. The second across the throat had him gasping and retching. The next doubled him up in agony. Silently, ruthlessly, Mark all but destroyed the renegade, beating him to the lush green carpet—sobbing, gasping, pain-wracked. Yet even as his eyes were glazing, the hatred seeped enough strength into his arm for Ginger to fling his hand against a wall switch set low down on the skirting board. Mark Slate crashed one foot into a vital part. Coke's breath gushed out in a sighing moan as he collapsed into senselessness. Mark picked up the gun.

Faintly, Mark heard the buzzer sound and guessed it to be in the room below. He clicked off the switch. The buzzing stopped. Footsteps sounded near the door. Mark stepped to one side of it as it opened wide. One man—large, craggy-faced—rushed in, gun leveled. Mark poised on the balls of his feet, measured distance, swung down with the gun butt. The man sprawled forward, *pole-axed*.

Two more men, unable to halt in time, stumbled over his legs. They were not carrying guns, but each had the build of a bullock. Mark grabbed clothes, swung mightily. Their skulls made a hollow-sounding crack—not very loud.

One spun away and crashed over the senseless first man. The other

staggered back; dazed but shaping to an attack. Mark hit him hard. The man shook his head. Mark said:

"Pray, brother, pray!" as he poised to connect again. The man's fist drew back—then suddenly his head lolled, his eyeballs rolled upward. He pitched face down across his companion.

"That's better," said Mark softly. "The next one would have killed you."

He saw a large roll of scotch tape on top of a filing cabinet and used it to make certain all three would remain where they were by taping wrists to ankles. He used their own ties and handkerchiefs to gag them.

He searched the ground floor rooms. All were luxuriously furnished, but empty. He tiptoed down to the basement. One room had bunk beds, lockers and a washbasin. The next more elaborately furnished. A quick search told him this was Ginger Coke's room, but he found no documents, letters or photographs. Which was strange, although he had no time to sort out the puzzle. An old R.A.F. uniform in the closet bore Ginger's name and number.

Mark went on down the passage, trod softly into the kitchen. A stout, middle-aged woman was dozing in a wicker chair beside a cooking range. She woke up, glancing at him.

"Oh, gawd! Are you another of 'em?"

"That's right, Ma."

"Well, you don't come in here, see? This is private. Your room's back there." She jerked a thumb.

"They're all out," he said truthfully.

"Out or in, I couldn't care less. What his Lordship will say to this carry-on I'm sure I don't know."

"His Lordship lives here?"

"Does it look like it? Nah! He's rented it—to a right funny lot, if you ask me. But they got money, and that's what counts these days."

"Dr. Karadin and his daughter?"

She sat up, glaring at him.

"Who are you to be asking questions?"

Mark grinned. "Just a new boy. I had lunch with Miss Karadin. She'll be upstairs, I suppose?"

"I wouldn't know—I never go up there. Come five o'clock and off I goes. Two meals a day, that's all I cook. Wanna cuppa tea?"

"No, thanks."

She smirked. "Ah—you want *her*, I s'pose! Well, she'll be more than willing, I daresay." She winked. "I would meself at her age. Off you go then—second floor. Shut the door after you."

He shut the door, found a key in the old-fashioned rim-lock and gently locked it. The cook didn't appear to be curious and he'd observed a street exit on the far side of the kitchen. He reached the hall. A telephone was ringing in the study. It stopped when he was halfway across the room as someone lifted an extension. Mark eased the handset off the contacts, and heard Suzanne's voice speaking in French.

"... as much time as I could. You must have made a quick trip. I do not like it here alone, Papa. And my Ginger has changed. Can I not come to you at Moorfell? He is so hard, so gone from me since he knew Mark Slate was in London. He tells me he will see me sometime. I have done what you told me and I thought Ginger"—she pronounced it Gingaire—"and I would have fun together."

"Suzanne—listen!" Dr. Karadin's voice was sharp. "Already I have had to silence one talkative woman—do not try my patience with your aimless chatter."

"Silenced! Oh, Papa—no, you have not killed that Dancer Woman? Oh, Papa!"

"Stop it, Suzanne—stop yowling. Of course I have not killed her. I do not like violence—you know that. But some things have to be done. Now, others in the organization will deal with her as Ginger and the London guard will deal with Mark Slate, and I can get on with the work that will make our fortune. Think of that, my little Suzanne. Think of having all the money you need to travel and live in luxury with beautiful clothes and cars... and your pick of the men. Think of all these things and do not worry because you are a little while alone. It is a big, big thing we are engaged in—so be good for Papa, eh? And not do silly things to upset me."

"No, Papa. But I would not be any trouble if you let me come to Dartmoor. I could drive my little new car. I would like that."

Karadin sighed gently. "Yes, yes, very well. Perhaps it is better that you should be here. Ginger will be too busy to spend much time with you. But do not hurry here for I also am very busy. Start tomorrow and stay overnight at any hotel you fancy. You can find your way?"

"I know the way from Exeter to the beginning of Dartmoor—but all those little roads confuse me."

"In the desk drawer in my study you will find a small map. It covers the area around Princeton and Dartmoor Prison so that anyone looking at it will think it is a map only of that. All you have to do is follow a dotted line leading north-east from a side road. The map key says... 'bridle path, unfit for motors, dangerous in fog, beware bogs'. The track itself, as you will see, is two miles from the main road. The side road sign says 'To Shale Farm only'. There is a tor—a high rock outcropping—a few hundred yards from where you turn. It is a good landmark for you."

"Is the track dangerous, Papa?"

"Not if you keep to it and do not wander off on to the moor. Where is Ginger now?"

"I heard him ring the alarm for the guards. I expect they've taken Slate down to the basement."

"Good. You keep out of it—understand? As soon as the cook leaves, Ginger will send for the transport to take Slate away. You did very well, Suzanne—very well indeed. We have taken two very dangerous people out of circulation. It was disturbing that they should be in London, and at that particular place, at such a vital time. But we gave them no opportunity to report to their organization. Now, I must go. Be good, my little one. We will meet soon."

Mark Slate carefully slid open the drawer while Suzanne was saying her long-winded goodbyes, found the map, checked it, then stowed it in his pocket. He was already on the second floor by the time she had replaced the receiver, and the faint tinkle as she dropped the handset guided him to her room.

He halted at the open door, momentarily surprised by the startling decor and furnishings. Most rooms in these old Nash houses were spacious with high ceilings. Here, false ceiling, curved, painted

brilliant sky-blue with coils of white cloud, suffused with golden light from hidden lamps, gave greater depth and breadth to the room.

Bright red and blue sail cloths were angled across the high windows, fore-standing against the superbly simulated sea scene painted on three of the walls. The door side of the room was a stone jetty. Rope bollards with padded tops faced a small, low stall with a backdrop painting of a life-like water side bistro. A capstan stood in front of a dressing table, set against the background of a ship's chandler's store, the table being the counter, To the left were sliding doors of a floor-to-ceiling wardrobe, the doors painted to appear like loaded shelves of the store.

The centre of the floor was one step below the "jetty"—a sand-colored, nylon-tufted carpet spread to meet the seascape walls. Resting on the carpet was a miniature yacht—white, sleek and beautiful—with one brilliant tangerine sail suspended from its mast. Aft of the mast, white and blue lounging chairs, deck lockers, tables were spaced below a slender guardrail. Fishing nets were draped from the "jetty" to this rail.

He couldn't see the stern half clearly because the sail was so fixed that it could be swung to partition or blank off each end. But under its boom he saw the lower portion of a bed, part of a cabin washbasin and bedside cabinets. He trod softly over the "jetty" as he heard the telephone being pushed over a hard surface.

Then the sail swung around to disclose the bed and top half of the furniture. It also disclosed Suzanne, stretching arms wide, yawning. Against the background of sails and sea she looked like—well, what she was. There was no time for Mark to indulge in fanciful allusions to water nymphs or mermaids. He had to cover the distance in two massive leaps to clamp his hand over her mouth.

He almost laughed because surprise, then fright, had frozen her body to the arms-stretched stance she had taken. Only her mouth and eyes moved. Both grew wider and wider. Mark grabbed her before the mouth was open wide enough to release the screaming bellow which, from such a chest development, might well have aroused the interest of the neighbors.

"I'll be very brisk and business-like," said Mark, holding her squirming body. "If you give me trouble, I shall make you unconscious very quickly. I don't want to do that, but I most certainly can—and will. Trouble from you means screaming or trying to run away. I'll give you an example." He pressed his finger into one side of her neck. Her body

began to droop in his arms. "You see? Your head started to buzz and the life seemed to go out of you. If you give me trouble, I'll cripple you —understand?"

She nodded, fiercely jerking her head against his restraining hand, which he now removed from her mouth.

"Please," she whispered. "Please don't hurt me—please!"

A negligee lay across the foot of the bed. He flung it at her. "Put it on."

She recovered now. "Ginger? What has happened to my Ginger?"

"He's sleeping downstairs."

"You have hurt him! I will kill you!" She sprang at him, hands clawing for his eyes.

He gripped her wrists. "Trouble—don't give it—remember? No, he's not dead. But I'll go down and finish him off if you don't behave." His gay manner changed swiftly, menacing power flowing out of him. She cowered back. Her gaze flicked to a row of switches.

"Don't try it," said Mark. "The guards are sleeping too. So is the cook."

A gleam of admiration lighted her eyes.

"You have done that to all of them? You are a very strong man." Then she shrugged and pouted—a little girl coy again. "But I am no use to you." She came close, sliding her hands up his chest. "I think perhaps you are stronger than my Gingaire."

He grinned. "I'm bloody sure I'm stronger than your Gingaire." He looked into her eyes. "If I were your Papa I'd paddle your rear end. Why don't you grow up, Suzanne? Get yourself married and have half a dozen kids." He paused. "Aw! What the hell!" He thrust her away. "So who told you to play up to me?"

"You know who."

"Gingaire, of course."

"Of course."

"To get me here?" He nodded. "Of course. Silly question, but I don't like loose ends. Why, Suzanne?"

She shrugged again. "Ask Ginger."

He flared at her. "If I have to ask Ginger, he'll die. Don't you understand that? or do you think this is just a pretty game?"

She shook her head. "No, not a game. It frightens me. Last night, a telephone call told them you and that woman had arrived. This morning you were followed. I saw you in Carnaby Street."

"Where were you?"

She giggled. "I was one of the models. Then I changed and went to the Tower with Ginger." She fluttered her eyelids. "I did it very good—yes?"

He sighed. "You did it bloody terrible—yes. We knew exactly who you were. All we didn't know was why, so we helped you to tell us. Now we know—and Ginger is sleeping and you are not going any place."

Anger and fear filled her eyes, then a crafty look appeared in them. "She is not going any place either—your April Dancer." She spat childishly. "Oh so clever, so grand. You torture me, but I do not tell you where she is. Ah! You see—that is not so good for you now, is it? You hurt my Ginger. We hurt your April Dancer. Now who is so clever?"

"You have a point there, darling. You're a very clever girl. I think you're much more experienced than I believed."

She was suddenly gay. "See? Not so blerdy terrible after all, eh? I tell you something, Mister Big Strong Man. This is the first time I help Papa. Because it is a big time and he must have only people he can trust to help him."

Mark nodded sadly. "I'm not very clever."

"Pooh!" she scoffed. "There is no one as clever as Papa—no one." She came close, moving her breasts against his arm, her wiggling finger digging under his chin—little dog teasing. "I tell you something else—soon the whole world will know how clever my Papa is!" She stepped back, snapped her finger under his nose. "Now we go wake up my Ginger. I tell him you do not hurt me, then he will not hurt you." She drew the negligee closer around her nakedness. "I think he will like to wake up and see me like this, eh?"

Mark stepped around her. "Better like this," he said quietly, and in a

few deft actions had flung the nylon fishing net over her, picked her up and rolled her in it. A coiled rope hung picturesquely from the "jetty". He fastened her in a net cocoon.

Gasping and struggling, her eyes glared at him through the mesh.

"You're just a little fish, darling," he said. "A little tiddler. You don't know enough to tell me the time."

She began to scream. Mark was prepared for it. He had already picked up a cake of soap shaped like a baby dolphin, and this he thrust through the mesh into her mouth.

"Have yourself a bubble bath!" He hoisted her over his shoulder, moved to the landing, found the bathroom, dumped her in the bath and left her frothing at the mouth.

He searched the house, swiftly, expertly. It seemed that Karadin and his daughter had furnished their own quarters with no expense spared, because the remaining rooms were tastefully but not luxuriously fitted. He found a group photo graph in one room: "Lord Larnous and family at their Bahamas home." The caption from a glossy magazine was stuck on the frame base. Mark winked at the big, frozen-faced woman standing next to his Lordship. "I can't imagine you in that yacht bed, duckie. But at the rent this place is paying—you should worry!"

The downstairs study was like a lush sleeping barrack room. Two men were semi-conscious, one was moaning. Ginger Coke was still out cold. Mark shoveled them on one side, after emptying their pockets. They all carried THRUSH identity discs. He pocketed these and went to the files. A special U.N.C.L.E. device soon had the locks freed.

The files were crammed with photostat maps of shopping centers in towns all over the British Isles. The notes below each map made it clear that these were sites of branches of a nation-wide group of fashion shops. Bus stops, supermarkets, banks and post offices also were marked in relation to the site of each shop. Figures gave peak density hours, halfday closing and, where applicable, the town's market day. Mark extracted several photostats as samples, went up to the yacht room, contacted London Headquarters, gave and received information crisply and clearly.

He sat quietly for exactly five minutes before he dialed the phone.

Jeff's voice said: "Key one speaking. Mark? Answer."

"U to Key one. London H.Q. cleared. This is priority. You agree?"

"Key one agreed." Jeff chuckled. "Things happen when you're around, old boy. They tell me in France the choppers are away."

"I so heard. What can you offer me?"

"A twin-engined Alster cabin job. No good for moor landing. Only a chopper's safe for that. Use Plymouth or Exeter. Our strips. Car from there. Snag arises. Jaguar available Plymouth. Aston Martin Exeter. You takes yer choice, mate."

"Exeter."

"Will do. Have Ministry Pool car standing by here. Velly pretty driver. Knows all short cuts to Hendon."

"You're wizzo, chum. Who said the Limeys were slow?"

"You did, if I recall aright. No matter. We survive. Make for York Gate entrance to Regent's Park. Driver will have envelope of money. Her name is Daphne. Lay off. Her and me have an understanding. And sign for that ruddy money! Wreck the car and the plane if you so desire, but leave not one chit unsigned, else all is chaos. The S.B. are sending a meat wagon to pick up your bods in fifteen minutes, so get clear—fast."

"I go," said Mark.

"Lucky perisher!" said Jeff plaintively. "Why did I give up field work? So long, glamour boy."

"Bless you, Jeff. See you!"

He raced down the stairs, opened the front door, surveyed the street, then closing the door gently sauntered nonchalantly away in the direction of York Gate.

Count Kazan drove down to the valley, skirting the town to reach the small heliport. A helicopter, rotors idling, stood waiting. He checked in at the office to obtain formal clearance and sign for the machine which was always hired to a company he used for the purpose.

"Alphonse is very quick today," said Kazan.

"It is not Alphonse," said the office manager. "He's sick, but the new

man, Gaston, is very efficient."

"So it seems." Kazan left the office, suspicions aroused. Any change made him suspicious, but he sauntered towards the machine as if he had no thought of anything but the pleasant time ahead, a rich man indulging himself. He climbed into the chopper. The pilot, helmeted and goggled, nodded to him.

"Thank you, Gaston. I will take her now."

"My orders are to stay."

"And my orders are for you to go," Kazan snapped, then whirled as he sensed danger.

A man was launching himself from the shadow behind the seats, cosh raised. Kazan flung himself to one side. His tiny sleep gun spat once. The dart hit the man in the neck. Kazan parried the down-slashing arm, thrusting the man away from him with such force that he plummeted through the open hatchway. In that same moment, searing pain lashed the back of his bead. Count Kazan pitched forward, dazed.

The helicopter then lifted swiftly, sending him headlong against the strutting, thus completing his collapse.

He came out of the blackness slowly. The rush of cold air through the open hatch helped to revive him quickly, but Kazan was too old a hand to show he was awake. The pilot had to turn at an awkward angle before he could see Kazan, and this gave him plenty of warning; so Kazan took his time, inhaling deeply and letting the throbbing ache pass away. He glimpsed the terrain through the opening and was surprised to recognize the beaches and hills of Monte Carlo. He must have been unconscious for a long time.

Slowly he edged a few inches at a time to a position directly behind the pilot, making it almost impossible for the man to sight him quickly. But Gaston became suspicious. He glanced back, hefting a stubby automatic.

"Don't try anything," he warned. "I'm putting down in a few minutes. If we crash, you'll be killed first—I'll see to that."

Kazan fired once, then leapt, his hand a searing edge slashing across the back of Gaston's neck. The gun fired upwards. The bullet sped through the perspex canopy and pinged off one of the rotor blades.

The helicopter juddered and began to slip sideways, then dipped sharply earthwards. Kazan had to use all his supple strength to roll the senseless pilot clear of the controls and then fight the now dangerously sliding chopper. The whole frame juddered as the chipped rotor caused an uneven swing. He cut power as low as he dared and kept the machine dipping and sliding in slowly descending spirals. A forest passed beneath him—then miraculously a tiny apron of a landing site appeared on his port side.

The thought occurred to him that this was the very landing site for which Gaston had been aiming. Kazan shrugged.

After all, whoever was waiting would not know Gaston was not in control. The radio was off, and to ground watchers the chopper obviously was in trouble. He snatched vital seconds to secure the gun lying between the seats before he coasted the machine to a lop-sided landing and switched off. The helicopter scuttled sideways, hopping crab-like. The action shot Kazan out of the hatchway.

He landed, cat-like, rolled several times to give his body impetus and any marksman a difficult target, then scrabbled to his feet and raced for the trees. He went deep among them to a small clearing with paths leading across it and sat beside a bush, gulping in air. Once his breath was under control he pulled out his communicator and called up Paris H.Q.

"Channel D—Channel D. Hear me. Kazan, helicopter, in woods north about twenty kilometers from Monte Carlo. Chopper damaged. Am making my way to a road. Will contact when clear of woods." Suddenly he saw movements glinting among the trees. Movements from all sides of him. He watched them come closer and closer until they ringed him with a circle of shimmering metal-clad forms.

"*Mon Dieu*!" said Kazan. "Rush me also a can opener—I am surrounded by canned goods! Over and out."

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PLUS FACTOR

DARTMOOR rain has a quality all its own. There is Dartmoor fog, and Dartmoor mist, and Dartmoor haze. Low cloud sweeping over the tors often will provide a mixture of all four, giving areas of sheets of penetrating rain over the highest points. On the slopes these will produce a form of fog—actually a whitish shroud of miniscule

moisture globules which lies on clothing, hair, beards or eyebrows in tiny quivering haloes.

In the depressions and hollows and over the rare level areas of ground this becomes a fairy mist—light, gossamer, and cruelly unreliable. It will caress you damply one minute, give a glowing effect around you, causing an illusion of sunshine about to burst through the clouds. The next minute you are lost and stumbling through a thick grey wall. Then, according to your proximity to a tor, the wind direction and force, it will speed away, allowing you to discover you should have been on a track somewhere else. As you hurry towards another path, thankful for deliverance, the fairy mist swoops up behind you, to again wrap you in its ghostie embrace.

You forge ahead in a straight line, not realizing that one of the most joyous results of being caught in it is that you immediately walk in a circle. You usually discover this when you sink oozily in a patch of bog, or break your leg in fissure or over a rock. For the walker caught on Dartmoor in such conditions there is one golden rule—don't. Don't walk, don't move. Stay put.

The so-called enlightened Victorians knew all about Dartmoor. They knew and appreciated its wild beauty, its sweep of purple-gold, undulating to the serene summer horizon. Here, a man could walk free with only the sky and the wheeling hawks above him, the heather beneath his feet, the shy ballet dance of gamboling sheep over the hillside, and the tumbling streams, fish-laden, joyously bubbling. Which is why they built a massive grey granite prison to house the most desperate of their criminals here on Dartmoor.

There are more houses now, but the prison still stands, the moors and quarries around it—an ugly, monstrous excrement of a monument to the glory of justice and retribution so beloved by those who built it. Occasionally some prisoners escape. A few have succeeded in breaking out of the moor itself, and reaching towns. But mostly they run from working parties outside the prison, seeking shelter in the fairy mist which proves to be a more unholy prison than the grey granite walls. Many are only too glad to be recaptured. Some die—lonely and afraid in the sibilant silence of the rain and mist—or lie wracked with pneumonia after falling into the river Dart—from which the moor is named—and slowly collapse in the shivering mist.

April Dancer had read a lot about Dartmoor. In her student days she had visited the prison as part of her studies on criminal codes, patterns and behaviors as well as to aid her work on a social science

degree. She could, in fact, have told Dr. Karadin a lot about Dartmoor. She'd stayed in at least three of the villages and hiked over its tors from each direction, as she also had done on Exmoor—a northerly range of hills and moors edged by the Bristol Channel. So she wondered why Karadin and the obviously wealthy organization behind him had chosen a house on Dartmoor as a research base.

Remoteness, quietness, away from prying eyes and gossiping mouths —those were reasonable factors; but were offset by the conditions of climate, time taken to reach town centers and London, and the normal difficulties of provisioning and communications, for in the very bad winters many parts of Dartmoor are cut off. Yet, she reasoned, organizations calculate all factors and their decisions are reached on the plus factor. What was the plus factor of Moorfell? If her own hunch was right, the climate itself could be this plus factor.

For that matter, why England at all? Karadin was French. Wouldn't he know of many isolated places in France? April Dancer had not yet received sufficient proof that THRUSH was the organization back of Karadin, but there were pointers which made her feel it safer to assume that this—whatever it was—had all the mark of a THRUSH project. And THRUSH had the world to choose from. She didn't believe for one moment that research into air pollution was Dr. Karadin's sole purpose in England. The British were well aware of their own air-pollution problems. Still, they might welcome Karadin and grant him certain facilities—such as permits to obtain drugs or chemicals needed for research, or to smooth the way a little by allowing a helicopter to land and take off near his base.

April had long since given up trying to analyze hunches which, in the past, had saved her life or that of a companion. She was aware that it was illogical and against the concepts of her training, but when these hunches were linked to fact they had previously been proved valid. It was too early for full understanding of the forces at work, and why, but with out doubt there was a tie-up between Carnaby Street, Karadin and incidents in America and Paris.

She had another hunch that Mark Slate would be discovering other links through the over-obvious attachment of Suzanne. April had knowledge that the vast network of U.N.C.L.E. was now following up her early reports, so that from a purely personal endeavor she now was on an assignment. She stepped from the helicopter, calmly dignified, having shed her Miss Babbling Tourist character and freed herself of the uncomfortable sticking plaster.

"I'm so glad I got to you." She smiled sweetly at Karadin. "Up to the moment when you pulled a gun on me and struck me with it, you were, as far as I'm concerned, completely within the law. Now you're guilty of assault with a deadly weapon, assault upon the person and detention by force. You're really not very bright are you?"

"Your trick was more clever than you think." He guided her towards the car. "My wife was a virago, a screaming shrew who babbled and screeched until she wore me out. So I am particularly vulnerable on that score. But I do not believe any great harm has been done. Once inside Moorfell you would have discovered you were a prisoner. Your torment of me merely caused that knowledge to be advanced."

They entered a closed car. The two attendants squeezed on to small occasional seats facing them. They were swarthy, impassive men.

"Manou and Greco," said Karadin. "Nice fellows, unless you upset them. They look like brothers but are not."

"You have some funny types working for you," said April. "Almost as if you expected prisoners."

"All secret projects must have a security force. I have overriding authority, but it is not strictly my affair. Once I hand you over to Sirdar's department, I am free of you."

"Sirdar the Turk?" said April. "I thought these two play mates looked familiar. Although you see their breed in every country. They all look as if they had the same mother—or perhaps I mean father?"

"Ah yes, of course—you would know of Sirdar the Turk in your business. It shows what an innocent I am in these international affairs. I had never heard of him. Have you ever met him?"

"Once," said April. "I broke both his arms."

"Oh dear!" said Karadin. "Then he will not like you very much, will he? But not to worry. He is not in England right now."

"He's prospered during these last few years. There seems to be limitless money to hire bodyguards, security guards and other thick-necked scum of our modern society. Oh, by the way, Doctor, I forgot to tell you..."

The car had entered a curving driveway. Karadin was moving in his seat, hand on door. He paused and looked back at her. "Yes?"

"Oh, nothing!" She smiled brightly. "It'll keep." The house was squat, dark-stoned under the dripping canopy of the trees surrounding it. Once a small moorland house, it obviously had been enlarged by wings at each side and a glass-enclosed verandah stretching from end to end, so that the original upper floor and roof appeared to have been stuck on as a builder's afterthought.

The hail was bright with fluorescent lighting, reflecting from white paint on walls and a number of smooth-paneled doors. A stone-flagged floor with a large refectory table dead center gave the place the air of a morgue. In an alcove beside the front door, an elderly man sat at a console of switches and dials. April noticed also a short-wave sender/ receiver radio.

Karadin said: "Your purse, Miss Dancer." He held out his hand.

"Oh, please!" she protested. "There's only a lady's doodads in it. Let me keep my self-respect!"

As she already had transferred certain vital U.N.C.L.E. devices to special pockets in her attractively fitting costume, she didn't really care whether or not they took it. She was not surprised when Greco snatched it from her.

Karadin searched it, tipping out the contents on to the table. The safety-catch was on the compact, so that when he flipped it open it appeared to be a harmless toiletry, as did the stiletto comb and the lipstick. April had had to take a chance on these remaining if she were made prisoner. No modern miss would be without such items in her purse. She left one red-herring—an obsolete U.N.C.L.E. communicator.

"Ah!" said Karadin, seizing it. "This is one lady's doodad you will not need!" He shrugged. "Otherwise—who wants such clutter?" He prodded the lining, then threw the purse across the table.

As her real communicator was tucked safely on her person she made a show of protest by swearing softly in French, a fact which seemed to please Karadin. He patted her hand.

"You must believe me—I am so sorry you forced me to take this action. I am not a fanatic, though many have called me one. I am sorry too that with your beauty and talents you should have chosen such a hazardous and unrewarding career." He gave a despairing gesture with his hands. "Oh, I do not mean money—no doubt you are highly paid—but you could have been a physicist, a doctor, a great sociologist—the world was yours to choose. I was one teacher who

gave you the foundation on which to build. You took my teaching but laughed at my ideals and my ideas. Now, you are still the pupil and I am still the master, but this time your lesson is going to be painful—and possibly final."

"Yet you would send me to it?" she enquired.

Again he spread his hands. "As I would send a child for correction. If you will not learn, then you must suffer. If you seek only to destroy all that you do not understand or agree with, then it may be necessary that you be destroyed."

She stared at him with level, unblinking gaze.

"I believe you are planning to create a currency chaos. If you do so, then you and your associates may become the rulers of the world. Would you expect us to stand by and applaud your efforts to achieve a near-world domination?"

His eyes glittered. "Oh yes, indeed you are dangerous, my dear Miss Dancer. And I am an emotional old fool to even try respecting your womanhood. Your brain is fast and deep, and I think you too have your dreams of power, yet you deny them to others." He snapped his fingers at Manou and Greco. "Take her—you know where."

She let them—in fact, made them—carry her up the stairs. They dumped her on a divan bed in a small, sparsely furnished room overlooking the rear of the house. The window was barred, but close inspection showed these were old fittings from the days when the room might have been a nursery.

"Well, sweetie," she said to herself, "you've got yourself just where you wanted to be—nicely helped along by K, the nutcase. We will now get organized." She began testing various items of equipment, and rearranging the U.N.C.L.E. devices about her person.

The house was quiet. The rain pattered hesitantly against the window, easing off now, the mist clearing from the lower slopes of the moors it had shrouded. She tested the compact TV circuit. Reception was poor, but by climbing on a chair and reaching up to where a TV aerial lead-in passed the window she obtained a stronger signal.

The voice was mushy and his picture blurred, but Roberts, the link man in London, could hear her. He listened carefully to her report and gave her the information for which she'd been waiting. "Good," she said. "Just what I wanted. But the British S.B. aren't holding the girl,

are they?"

"There's not really any charge against her. In fact, she could charge Mr. Slate with assault."

April chuckled softly. "I bet she would too. Now listen, Robbo—get on to Slate's friend Jeff and fix for him to hustle Suzanne into that nursing home we control in London. You know?"

"I know. Are you asking for assistance?"

"Not yet. I must find out the purpose of this place before we make any attack. This is a lone-wolf job. If we bungle it, the whole organization may fade away." She paused, hearing footsteps. "Danger comes. Over and out."

She leapt to the door, hammering on it with her fists and yelling: "Hey—you there—hey!" The lock snicked back. She had to jump away to avoid being hit by the door as it crashed inwards.

"You stop," said Greco. "No shout—see?" His big hand stretched out, dirty spatulate fingers almost touching her lips.

Revulsion filled her with sudden fury.

"Don't paw me—you big clunk!" Her hands fastened on wrist and elbow. She moved fast and sure. Greco yelled as the bone snapped in the same second that his body was impelled in a flying arc across the room. He crashed on to the washbowl, head first. It split asunder as his head lolled back among the debris. She stepped across and took the gun from his pocket.

"Oh, well!" April Dancer shrugged. "I guess I was too good to last." She walked downstairs.

The elderly man at the console stared at her. Then at the leveled gun. His fingers eeked towards a red button.

"Please don't," said April. "I dislike killing, and wounding is messy."

The man's fingers stopped moving.

"I want one thing from you, Pop—just one. On which extension can I speak to Dr. Karadin?"

"Extension 12." He flicked a finger towards the board. "You just depress this key." He grinned. "You've got guts, lass, but you'll not get

out of here. Yon moor is a scary place for a girl on her own, even if you do."

"Well, well! A soft-hearted custodian. And Yorkshire to boot!"

"Aye." His eyes widened. "Nay, lass, wait..."

The tiny sleep gun spat accurately. He clapped a hand to his chest, his eyes filled with fear.

"It's okay, Pop," she said softly, coming close. "You'll just sleep, that's all—just sleep."

His eyes glazed even as she spoke. April eased him into the corner, where the console hid him from a casual glance. She sped to the front door, turned a massive key and gently opened the heavy door. The rain had stopped. Golden shreds patterned the sky. She surveyed the path curving between shrubbery to the eastern wing, paused for a moment, then stepped hack into the morgue-like hall. She called extension 12.

"Karadin," he snapped. "Sam, I told you not to call me unless it was urgent."

"I've remembered what I wanted to tell you," said April. "We have Suzanne. She is in the Baldini Clinic in west London. Phone them and confirm it. We also have Ginger Coke—and a few others."

She heard him gasp before she lowered the handset, sped to the front door and out on to the path, ducking under a bush when she saw Karadin and two white-coated figures rushing along the verandah.

Her trained, experienced and highly intuitive mind reasoned that Moorfell was more a testing base than a research centre. The extensions to the original house, although cleverly constructed of local stone, were not more than a year old. The switchboard's intercom key tags bore only one marked LAB. April had noticed three marked TEST, and two marked RANGE. Therefore the extensions must be mainly functional and contained few sleeping and living quarters—probably only four, excluding the three rooms on the second floor—because the other key tags were numbered 8 to 12. Karadin was 12 and he'd come from this end. He wouldn't go chasing the length of the building each time he wanted to leave, or at times of test on what could well be outside areas—or ranges.

The door was cleverly disguised to appear as an unbroken wall

covered with flowering clematis. April swiftly peeled off the sealing of a lock-blowing device, inserted this deep into the oval slot and detonated it. The flat-sounding "phut" wasn't even loud enough to worry the birds, although a black bird went skittering and squawking across the drive—more in protest against her than at any noise, because he started his swoop a second before the miniature explosion came.

April checked the door surrounds, discovered the alarm strip, saw it was not activated and deduced that a master switch must control it, although probably this wasn't made live until a certain time. She neutralized the strip so that it wouldn't set off the alarm when activated.

She eased the door closed and stood on a tiled area from which one slope led downwards and the other up. Quartz lighting beamed from cornices set at angles along each wall, alternating from each side. She chose the up slope, followed it around a curve and came directly into a dome-ceiling room containing a row of racks full of cylinders. Trolleys, similar to those used to move oxygen, were lined, soldier-like, against the racks.

To the left were shelves on which were arrayed an intriguing selection of items. April noted them carefully. Training had not given her the gift of mental photography, but it had turned that gift into the split-second accuracy of a reflex camera. She didn't clutter the screen of her mind with unnecessary or unwanted images, but that which she wished to see and record was implanted there with lightning speed.

Butterfly nozzles as used in lawn spraying. Several sizes of candy-striped barber's poles. Barber's poles?—She saw Carnaby Street and the strangely speeding poles and felt a tingle of excitement.

Then a selection of miniature street lamps and traffic signals. What the hell? She inspected these more closely, fiddled with one, and almost lost the top of one finger when she touched a hidden switch and a small but powerful motor attached to tiny metal vanes started up, sending a strong force of air against her hand.

Next came a collection of street signs. "No waiting" discs. "One way", "Stop", "No U turn" and suchlike, as well as street name plates for wall or post fixing. She discerned only two differences from the real thing. They were thicker, and the underside edges bore a row of tiny holes. She picked up one, expecting it to be heavy metal. It was feather light, metal-simulated polystyrene which looked exactly like the real thing.

The rear side had a flat plastic box heat-welded on to the base, a small slide aperture dead centre. Cautiously she moved the slide to the left. A small button was revealed. She pressed it and wasn't surprised to feel a tiny motor buzzing into life. Air flowed out quite strongly from the holes.

Telephone insulators, dummy plastic but impossible to tell the difference at a few yards' distance, cable insulators, electric light bulbs —which weren't, but in daylight who could tell?—fluorescent tubes, a gaily striped shop or door canopy, the edges of its frame perforated with holes. A varied and amazing selection of natural objects, and almost every one a fake.

"This is ridiculous!" April muttered. "Who would want to forge street signs?"

She tested the sliding door in the far wall. It rolled smoothly open. She closed it, surveyed the long, narrow room. Undoubtedly the LAB. Not a science-fiction writer's dream. Very clinical, clean and disappointing. A long work bench, porcelain trays neatly stacked at one end. A row of plastic jerry-cans—all empty. Then a functional sink, a small water heater, electric kettle, a coffee percolator.

The whole of one wall was lined with dull grey cabinets looking like out-of-work washing machines. April concentrated on these and was happy to recognize the lay-out required for the despised Parsimal theory, from the pressure-filled storage compartment right through to pulsator, separator and air-extraction unit. Now the whole caboodle was going click, click, click in her mind. Karadin the old fraud! Denying Parsimal but copying the whole technical lay-out to prove the theory. All except one important part.

April flashed her mind back to her student days in Paris. The screen of memory hazed, flickered, then cleared. She went again to the last cabinet, and slid open the inspection flap. The Parsimal Theory didn't require a compressor. In fact a compressor would nullify the earlier stages, so the processing was a waste of time. It was jelling now. For a moment April wished she had gone on to a degree in physics, for she felt her present knowledge inadequate for the task. Then suddenly she had the link—separate and compress instead of separate, diffuse and direct, and what would you get? Molicular globules in suspension! That wasn't the correct technical definition, but the substance was near enough an answer to satisfy her.

The apparatus also would satisfy the British authorities, because

similar processes could be used for research into air pollution via rain, fog, mist or steam condensation. Dr. Karadin didn't have to disclose his method or techniques and formulas. April's excitement grew as she discovered proof linking to what, in the first instance, had been a hunch on her part. But she still needed more evidence.

The next door had to be persuaded. It wasn't difficult to break the magnetic circuit, but the task took time. At last she was inside the Karadin sanctum—this was obvious by the furnishings, the desk photograph of his daughter and himself. The far door was partly open, as was a steel filing cabinet. Proof of his hurried exit.

"Well, thank *you*, Dr. K," April muttered. She closed the door and went swiftly to the files. This took time, but it was not time begrudged. She ignored the ordinary business files of letters after a quick glance through them. A slim file at the back held her attention. It contained photostat copies. The originals, according to code symbols, were in America. She didn't wait to decipher these in full, but pressed on to the contents. These were written in Urdu.

This variety of Hindustani is not commonly known to Westerners. Much of its vocabulary is taken from Arabic and Persian. But April had learned Arabic as a child when her father was serving in the Middle East, and later in India found it comparatively easy to learn Urdu, which was spoken by the Moslems. No doubt Karadin and his organization bosses considered that such documents, if written in Urdu, would not require any higher security than a stout steel file cabinet. That this was unlocked would be due only to the abrupt departure of Karadin from the office.

April searched around for a container of some sort, and soon found a leather-capped zipper shoulder bag next to fishing tackle in the far corner. The bag smelled fishy but was clean and dry. She stowed the papers into it, as well as a. sample of letters from some British manufacturing chemists referring to supplies. She stowed her own purse in it as well. She was about to zip up the bag when she heard footsteps.

She opened her purse, took out the lipstick and moved to one side as the door opened. A small dark woman came in, a mannish-looking woman with cropped hair, wearing a white coat and slacks. She looked at the open file cabinet, closed it, took keys from her pocket and locked it, muttering:

"Oh, really, Carl—you panic too quickly, you poor darling!" April

closed the door. "Yes, doesn't he?" she said quietly. The woman gasped and whirled around. She was in her thirties, dark-eyed, fine drawn, with crows feet of tiredness or strain pouching her eyes. She leapt to the desk, hand reaching for the drawer nearest her. April dropped the bag and leapt just that shade faster. She had the drawer open, fended off the woman with the other hand, using the woman's own impetus to spin her off-balance, to crash against the wall.

April took out the gun, snicked off the safety-catch. It was a Voegler automatic with silencer.

"Thanks," she said. "I thought there must be one some where, but I hadn't got around to looking for it." The woman moved. "No, dear—don't try it." The gun spat. The bullet plucked the shoulder seam of the woman's white coat and thudded into the wall.

"Mmm—quite accurate," April observed. "The next one will hurt you, so please—no heroics, huh?"

The woman's face had paled, her eyes scared. "I've heard that your sort of woman is ruthless. That you even like killing. But it won't help you to kill me."

April smiled. "I wouldn't dream of killing you. I said hurt you—ping, ping in nasty juicy places—unless you are sensible." She frowned quizzically. "My sort of woman? Now I wonder what that means?"

"I've heard all about you. Why, he even admires you—though he admits you're dangerous."

"Ah! That's men for you—two-faced, aren't they? Funny thing, Bertha, but I admire Carl darling too."

"My name is not Bertha."

"Is it not? It suits you though." She paused. "So what do we do now, Bertha?" She slid the swivel chair clear of the desk. "I think you'd better come and sit down." She waggled the gun as she added sharply: "Come on, now, Bertha—my sort of woman is very short on patience."

The woman came slowly at first, then with a little shrug of resignation moved swiftly to the chair, sat down and looked up at April, who had hitched one thigh on the desk corner. They both heard the sound of the helicopter taking off, growing louder as it passed overhead. Tears filled the woman's eyes.

"So he's gone to his daughter?" said April softly.

The woman's hands covered her face. "Damn her!" she said huskily. "Damn her, damn her, damn her—the little bitch!" She lowered her hands and glared at April. "And damn you too!"

"Good for you!" said April. "Let's have a good damn all round. Damn the project, damn the organization—damn everything except that which binds my man to me. Is that it, Bertha?"

The woman lowered her gaze, began fiddling her fingers, locking and unlocking them, surveying them, flexing them.

"My name is Ingrid."

"Nice. Swedish?"

"My mother was. I shan't tell you anything."

"Who cares?" said April airily. "What would you have to tell anyway? I doubt if you know the whole story." She looked shrewdly at Ingrid. "A biology degree, a career- woman complex, perhaps a doting mother who hated men. A few rather boring jobs. Then suddenly the charming Dr. Karadin—the secret research work, the close contact, the sweet, sad fire of suddenly discovered passion expressed through the experienced doctor. The togetherness, the seeming fulfillment, the promise of fortune and a future shared—and a ready-made daughter in a package deal."

Ingrid's eyes stared widely. "How could you know all that? How could you?"

April shrugged. "Right?"

"Almost to the letter. In God's name—how?"

"You are legion," said April sadly. "Oh dear heaven, yes—you are legion! We could have a long, cozy, girlish chat, but there's no time, and I'm afraid it would bore me. Because, dear Ingrid, your sort do bore me."

"We can't all be as hard as you. You're some sort of agent, aren't you?"

"Mmm—some sort."

"You must live an unnatural life."

April laughed. "What is natural?—the tiger in a cage or in a jungle? The cloistered nun or the cluttered housewife? The prissy missy or the supercilious spouse? The idealistic teenage infant or the mature and marvelous mother? We are them all—you and I—each in our own way—past, present or future. So spare me that guff about being unnatural. Would you like to tell me how many guards are left in this house?"

"He's gone, so what does it matter?"

"That's a fair conclusion. Maybe he'll come back for you?"

"He won't. He'll get her away—out of danger. Not me." She shivered. "I've got to look after myself now. I've done nothing wrong."

"Well, if you have—it's got to be proved."

"I don't know exactly what the globules are for. They will certainly neutralize sulphur in the air." She glanced up, eyes clear now. Intelligent eyes. "But there's more to it than that, isn't there?"

"Yes, dear—a lot more."

She nodded slowly, then smiled. "There's only Greco and Prodder and me here. There are five guards out on the moors searching for you."

"Prodder?"

"You shot him, didn't you? The switchboard operator."

"Only to sleep," said April.

"Well, he's sleeping. I've given Greco first aid, but he needs a doctor."

"All in good time. How long have you worked here?"

"Nearly two years. It's been—it was—the most wonderful time of my life. Until she came over from France six months ago. Then he had a lot of money. That luxurious house in London—and these tough men always about the place."

"Did you ever see Sirdar the Turk?"

"So you know about him too? Yes, he stayed here for about a week. A horrid man."

"Anyone else?"

"Quite a few visitors. Important men. Some foreign, some American, and a few British, who came to see the range experiments."

"So Carl put on a show for them?"

"Well, yes, he had to. You know what this country is like. You need lots of permits and licenses—things like that. So they send these inspectors and officials. It was a great joke to Carl. He'd say: 'Come along, darling, let us put on our magicians' act for these earnest little men.'"

"But not using the Urdu formula?"

Ingrid looked startled. "I'm not saying any more. Shoot me if you like. I'm saying nothing that will harm him."

"Oh brother!" April murmured. "You sure are legion!" She manipulated the lipstick, eased off the desk and sauntered around the chair. She pressed the secret contact. The needle containing chloral hydrate shot out ready for use.

"I don't know where you go from here," said April, "but I'd make it a long way if I were you." She pressed into Ingrid's arm where the sleeve had ridden up. Surprisingly, Ingrid didn't cry out.

"I don't care," she said. "I don't care any more." She was still saying it as she fell asleep.

April took the key bunch and left.

The keys opened the way to swift inspection of Ingrid's own office, a lobby containing dresses made of the silvery-glinting metal. April detached samples for analysis. A monitoring room next to the hall gave her a laugh when she manipulated the instrument controls and saw the guards spaced out over the moors, probing into bushes and gullies, looking for her. All were wearing metal suits. She also saw that three cameras were focused on the "ranges"—sites placed at three levels on the moors. Not much to see. Merely skeletal structures of varying heights stepping up to a tower. April connected these with the collection of items in the first room and obtained a fair picture of the purpose.

She also found in the monitoring room the alarm/protection system of controls, trip wires and infra-red beams which worked thunder flashes, smoke pots and other warning devices. She set all the switches at "alert". She could now proceed through the rest of the building

knowing she couldn't be taken by surprise.

CHAPTER SIX: GO— GAL— GO!

MARK SLATE ran the Aston Martin around the back of some bushes, climbed to a vantage point and surveyed the house and the moor surrounding it. He saw the men working their way over the moor, but they were far distant enough to give him time to get inside. There was no movement in the grounds, nor lights, even though dusk was near.

He'd circled around as far as he dare take the car in case it got bogged down and was approaching the house from the opposite side to the trees and driveway. A high fence ran from the original wall at the front to meet up with the same wall at the rear; it was electrified and no doubt connected with alarms inside the house. He searched for the contact wire and feed junctions, found and neutralized them.

Within five minutes he was inside the grounds. He had scarcely gone three yards when a thunder flash exploded, and two smoke pots fizzed off acrid clouds.

"Aw, to hell with it!" he exclaimed. "They daren't use any killer devices here. The worst I'll get is some scorch marks." He sped over grass in a straight line. His guess was good, for the devices were staggered so as to catch the intruder who zigzagged. Mark set off only one flash before reaching a side door. "Bash on!" he muttered. "They'll turn the dogs loose any minute." Drawing his U.N.C.L.E. gun, he blasted the lock, crashed the door open and leapt inside.

The room was filled with racks and shelving. Metal suits hung on the racks, gumboots, gloves and shiny hats shaped like firemen's helmets, and items that looked like hand fire extinguishers, filled the shelves. He pressed on. No time for detailed inspection. April Dancer must be somewhere in the center of this rambling house.

He went through a small office containing two bunk beds, a desk, portable typewriter. Graphs hung on the walls. A notice board held lists of duty rosters.

He slid open a partition, was faced with a steel door, and tentatively tried the catch. The door swung inward. He stepped into a long white room, apparently a mixture of laboratory and packing room. He whirled as a voice behind him said:

"What kept you?"

Mark holstered his gun.

"Blast you, April! Can't you ever be the distressed damsel rescued at the last minute by the great dumb he-man?"

She flashed a smile at him, leaned forward and kissed his cheek.

"Hiya, he-man!"

He returned the kiss. "Hiya, damsel! Did you have a bad last minute?"

"Uproarious!" She chuckled. "I set all the alarms so I wouldn't be disturbed. Then I saw you, but I was too late to switch off." She waved a hand. "Very busy here. You got news?"

"Most of it will keep, but Headquarters are rather keen for us to call in the French choppers if we need help. Seem to be nervous of us starting anything in England."

April's eyes widened. "Oh golly! Headquarters—I forgot all about them!"

"Forgot! That, me old darling, can be construed as famous last words. Well, goodbye—nice to have worked with you!"

She tapped the bag, said in a wheedling voice: "I've got goodies. Formula, samples, lists, suppliers—and I'm just about to collect the gem of all the goodies—a real live sample of K.S.R.6."

"Which is what?"

"This." April walked to where a large vat stood next to racks of small containers. "Neat K.S.R.6. You press the end of a container in here. It's compression-filled and self- sealing." She moved a sliding cupboard door. A small tap fell out. "Then you screw this into the sealing and you have yourself a prescribed dosage of K.S.R.6 for any purpose—distance no object."

"You've done all this?"

"Not yet. You set off the bang-bangs and disturbed me."

"Is this stuff dangerous?"

"In concentrated form—yes, I'd say it is." She pointed to the end wall.

"There are gowns and mob-caps—like surgeons use, only in this weird metal stuff. Masks and gloves too."

"How much time have we?" Mark asked as he hurried to fetch the clothing.

"Until the guards come back, and as much time as we can make." April was turning valves and watching dials. "I don't know how long this thing will take for pressure to build up."

Mark took out his slim pigskin case. "I need a smoke. Have one?"

"Not now."

He put the case on the porcelain bench top near the vat and lit up. They helped each other on with the metal clothing, leaving the masks looped under their chins.

"You were quick," said April. "Your old-boy-pals act paid off, huh?"

"Thought you hadn't been in contact?"

"I mean Mr. Waverly. Good car?"

"Spot on. The plane was a bit ropey on one engine, but we made it. I cut off the moor road, risking a smashed axle or some such point. We've only to scoot around this place and on to the track leading to the road. Then we can make for Plymouth or back for the plane at Exeter. Might need gassing up."

"Or if in a hurry, call the French choppers."

"Looks as if the noble Count has bought it."

"Dead?"

Mark shrugged. "Surrounded by figures in this metal gear last time we heard of him. THRUSH hijacked his chopper. But Sama Paru is around some place. Isn't this blasted thing cooking yet?"

April grinned. "Hungry?"

"Don't remind me—I am!" He plumed smoke. "So you managed to get Papa out of here. Nice work."

"Thanks. Seems you did a neat job in Regent's Park."

They smiled at each other.

"You're gorgeous," said Mark. "Nice holiday?"

"Delightful! I think supper's about ready." She laughed. "Those guards must have wondered whether to stay or come back here."

"Would they have heard the bang-bangs?"

She shrugged. "Possibly—but even so, they'll take time to get back. Pull up your mask and stand by."

Mark said: "There's a release valve this side. I'll ease it off if you strike trouble."

"Here goes!" April pushed home the container. In her eagerness to ram it hard enough to perforate the sealing and so lock the container to the filler valve, she tilted it slightly off-center. A stream of fluid hissed over her hands and the porcelain-topped bench. Mark spun the release valve, but the injector had ceased.

"Timed flow," he said, screwing up the valve. "Try again."

April took another cylinder. This time she made no error. The hissing of the injector stopped. The container jerked back in her hands. She shook it gently, inspected it. "One more for luck." She filled another, collected a handful of taps, put these and the containers in the bag, zipped it up, then turned to see Mark staring at the bench.

"My God! This stuff's a killer—look at my case! Or what was my case." The pigskin had dissolved into a gooey mess, shriveled away from the metal frame.

"Neat K.S.R.6," said April, spreading her gloved hands. "It sprayed all over these; but they're okay."

"Car-iss-ima! What will it do to the human skin?"

"It isn't intended for use on skin, but people in constant contact with it must wear this type of clothing."

Mark nodded. "It jells, darling—it jells. Clever girl! Those chicks in Carnaby Street gave you the lead?"

April smiled. "I'd like to go down to posterity as a genius, but no—not as simple as that. I thought the dresses intriguing. I couldn't see why they were being modeled so publicly, because they weren't on sale.

Then I saw Dr. Karadin and a silly little bell started ringing in my wee head. Years ago he had this thing about the Parsimal Theory—I won't go into that now—but he also had a very, very big thing about a world currency. He belonged to a wealthy family, but some collapse of the currency in which their wealth was invested wiped out his inheritance."

"So he became a fanatic on the subject? That's understandable. It ain't funny to see all your buy go down the spout."

"That's true. But he made a lot of trouble for himself. Professors in politics, or those who interfere in political issues, are not very popular. Yet he was a brilliant scientist. I think he still is." She stared at Mark. "What is worse than a brilliant scientist who becomes a nutcase?"

"Two ditto scientists."

"One is enough to devise a bomb."

"And if that one defects with his nasty little secret..."

"… and finds someone who not only believes in him and his work but guarantees him a fortune and—say—a world currency?..."

Mark grinned. "I'd better empty my teapot!"

"Teapot?"

"Weak joke. An old British custom. They can't abide to throw away old teapots. They keep 'em and stuff 'em with money for their holidays or a rainy day. Yes—I don't need a diagram to see the connection." He paused, gazing at April as he said slowly: "That's what happened to my cash paper money—and yours! Holy Hannibal—wotta jolly old carve-up!"

"But not Dr. Karadin's cash in its" — she flicked the gown—"in its cozy metal protection."

"Nor Suzanne's with her little purse ditto."

April grinned. "So you put the bite on her for lunch?" Then seriously tapping the vat: "This is neat K.S.R.6 in here. It stands weakening to around a thousand to one."

"A thousand to one what?"

"Rain water, or specially softened water. It is designed to be spun out under pressure and is so constituted that it remains in miniscule globules."

"You should put that to music. So we are surrounded by miniscule globules. Why then does not our skin peel off?"

"In that diffused solution it doesn't affect the skin. As the moisture dries out, a vapor is released from each globule. This vapor has an affinity of reconstitution with banknote paper and the ink used to print it. The dosage can be varied for each country, according to types of paper and ink. The vapor penetrates clothing, purses, wallets, through cracks in doors or safes, is carried into banks, shops—anywhere. All paper money will absorb it—some parchments or heavy quality paper also can be affected. Once the vapor reaches your money it at once reconstitutes itself and, in the process, turns your lovely crisp notes into an ugly, indistinguishable mess."

"So all we have to do is carry ruddy great bags of silver—at least those who have enough notes left to change into silver?"

"Don't be a fool, Mark."

"Sorry, mate. You've certainly done your homework. So this is Karadin's base and jollop factory?"

"The British one. Important, I think, because the British print currency for a number of countries. And possibly the first, being easiest for Karadin to prove his case to his backers. But make no mistake, Mark—this is global, and their plans must be pretty far advanced."

"Ye gods! The Global Globules! Darling—they won't believe us! And if they do..." He paused and whistled softly.

"Yes," she said. "It doesn't call for much imagination to picture the panic by ordinary people whose wages and housekeeping money is suddenly worthless—the run on all banks and currency issuing centers. Even their vaults aren't safe. Chaos—economic chaos. Would the way be open for a world currency? But that is only a starter."

"Is there an antidote—or whatever the stuff might be called?"

"I wouldn't know." She touched his silvery metal sleeve. "Only this stuff is protection..."

Mark whirled, running to the window as they heard thunder flashes

exploding. "The guards are back! More of them than I thought—and three are not wearing metal clothes."

"We'll have to bluff them," said April. "With the face masks pulled up..."

"...And these comical hats. Hold on to that bag, me old darling—I'll cover your getaway." He fumbled under the gown for his pocket. "The car keys."

"Both of us

"No—dammit it, woman, stop being so bloody equal!" He grinned. "And anyway, that bag is bigger than both of us!"

April said: "The metal men are going around that end—we'll go out the front hall. The other three are heading thataway."

They left the room, masks pulled up.

Mark said, close to her ear: "Car radio—red switch on left—push down for open circuit Channel D link with all-Europe H.Q."

She nodded, briefly. Her eyes smiled at him. Then they were in the hall.

The three men had just entered.

"... Where's that old fool Sam?" a dark, thick-set man was saying. "Ah! Ingrid! What's going on here? I couldn't raise the house on the car phone. And what the hell are the guards doing, parading over the moors in their K suits? We've finished tests." He halted, peering hard, obviously noting the difference in coloring of eyes and hair. "You're not Ingrid—"

April Dancer took one pace forward, then a swift side step as the man's hand flashed to a shoulder gun. Her free hand flicked across his eyes, the point of her shoe swinging against the most vulnerable point of his knee. His body came forward and down as his leg gave way, leaving his neck a perfect target. April didn't waste the target. Her hand chopped down. His body pitched forward and lay still.

The other two men had stood back, undecided, and not quick enough to move as fast as their companion. Mark Slate took one of them, crashed him to the floor and got a wrist hold on the second man's gun-arm before the gun was leveled. The gun fired upwards. Mark broke

the man's arm, then in a flurry of blows collapsed him.

April was nearing the door, tearing off the restricting gown.

"Come!" she called as Mark picked up the man's gun. The door burst open and more metal-clad figures rushed in.

"Go!" Mark yelled to her. "Go—gal—go!"

CHAPTER SEVEN: PRETTY LADY LIKE LIFT?

THE incoming guards had set off smoke traps in the driveway when their Land Rover swung around at the far end, running over a section of the lawn to miss a Jaguar car parked slantways by the front door.

A veil of white smoke hid the end of the building through which Mark had entered. Two men in metal suits were dowsing part of the drive with hand fire extinguishers—possibly to neutralize other devices. They saw April run out, one arm still in the metal gown, the mask still on her face. Obviously thinking she was Ingrid, they came towards her, calling: "Go back, Miss—go back!" and pointing to the lawn where smoke still wreathed over the grass.

April called: "Get on with your work and mind your own business."

The nearest man hesitated.

"D'you hear me?" April yelled. "Do as I say!" The authority in her voice was made more effective by her own urgency.

This bluff worked and the man turned back. April sped across the lawn, around a clump of rhododendrons towards the main gate. Out of sight now, she shed the metal garb, rolled it up, stuffed it into the zipped bag and raced for the wall.

She could have cleared the fence, but the wall was a better bet, this section being screened from the house. Over the wall, a quick survey for direction and on she raced, to where she judged the car would be hidden.

"Ooh—you beauty!" she panted as she reached the sleekly powerful car and eased herself behind the wheel.

She depressed the red switch near the radio panel.

"This is April Dancer—hear me! April Dancer and Mark Slate in vicinity of Dartmoor house called Moorfell. Have vital information and samples for urgent collection. Send nearest helicopter for pick-up from Aston Martin car on moor. I then return to house to aid Mark Slate. This is April Dancer. I wait."

She heard the click-burr of the connectors as the H.Q. relay opened the European circuits and linked them with New York. Then Robbo's voice said: "London H.Q. Hear me!"

"I hear."

"Sama Paru and helicopter already in Dorset is on the way. Will need you in open for pick-up."

"Of course you will," said April. "Am I so dumb?"

"You never were, my dear Miss Dancer," said Mr. Waverly's voice. "Your information and samples urgently required—also your report. Proceed by helicopter to our laboratories outside Le Havre."

"But Mark Slate is back there..." she began.

"I have no doubt that what Mr. Slate gets into, he will find a way out of," said the urbane Mr. Waverly. "Contact me from Le Havre. Good luck!"

"H.Q. out," said Robbo.

"And good luck to you too!" April snarled. She started the engine, blipped the accelerator, rejoicing in the powerful roar, set the gear and put the big car into full stride.

The tires slithered, the suspension protested, the wheel bucked in her hands as the car zoomed over the grass and heather of the moor. She had to hold opposite lock continually to keep the car heading towards the track leading from Moorfell, which she was skirting in a half-circle.

Once on the track she notched up the gears, misjudged the effect of a rain-greased surface and felt the rear-end break away, too late to hold it. Revs were too high, rear wheels sliding, front wheels skittery. She steered into the skid, pulled the handbrake full on and brought the car around in a controlled spin, applied opposite lock, released brake and cut power. The car rocked to a halt, facing the house.

As April geared the car and began turning again, she saw the Jaguar come speeding from the driveway.

"Blast!" She flung another look behind her. The car held two figures. "Thought it might have been Mark." She settled down to a desperate drive.

Desperate it was. The Jag driver knew the road. April did not, but her photographic memory came to her aid. She flashed in a mental picture of the moor road she had glimpsed as Karadin's helicopter had come in to land, recalled the track joining the road, and another road cutting diagonally across to one of the tors.

The Aston Martin zoomed off the track in a controlled power slide—a glorious four-wheeled drift that would, on a race track, have delighted the purists—then bucketed along the road. The Jaguar lost ground.

April glanced up. The sky held that strange golden light which comes often after an apparently approaching dusk. The land was sharp-etched, the air still and clear. Day stood poised on the edge of night. And in the distance, away to her right, she saw a small black speck, too distant to be a hawk, too wingless to be a plane. She flicked the red switch, looked in the mirror. The Jag was two corners behind her.

She drove full bore into the road-junction approach—as if she were going straight on. Then with a skilful toe-and-heel action, she stabbed on the brake pedal, blipped the accelerator, snicked the gear lever into second, released brake and power, held the car into the skid and zoomed at right angles into the diagonal road.

In the mirror she saw the Jag overshoot and slide into a wild skid so that it had to backup. Breathing space was now hers. She could also see the chopper. She turned the radio volume up to full power.

Then the engine cut out—stuttered, roared on. April glanced at the fuel gauge. The needle was juddering against "empty".

"Oh, great!" she exclaimed. "Just great! Come on, beauty—squeeze that tank dry!"

The radio boomed and crackled, but the voice was lost in the noise. Meanwhile the Jaguar was gaining slightly. April conserved gas by an easy throttle. The speed was still around seventy, dropping from ninety.

Inspiration flashed into her mind. She pulled U.N.C.L.E. gum from her

pocket and began to chew the saliva-activated explosive.

The radio became clear. "Helicopter to car. Sama Paru to April Dancer. Hear me?"

"Yum-yum-yum!" said April, chewing for dear life and trying to watch Jaguar and helicopter at the same time.

"I do not read," said Sama Paru.

"Yum!" yelled April, dripping saliva.

The car jerked from gas starvation. She looked back, judged the distance, steadied the car, took the now enlarged wad of gum from her mouth and flung it over-arm to the rear of the car.

"Pretty lady like lift?" said Sama Paru. The chopper was now slip-sliding above her. A nylon and metal ladder dropped down from the hatch.

She looked back as the Aston Martin's engine began its last coughing revs. She heard no explosion, only saw the light mist of the energy-release-wave. The Jaguar's front wheels reared up and the whole car swung to one side, rear wheels plowing into turf. Then it careered on to the near-side fender corner, pancaked, and rolled over.

At that moment the Aston's gas gave out. The car stopped with a jolt that sent April's head against the wheel. The helicopter over-ran, swung out, dipped and came back—ladder trailing. April gathered the bag around her shoulders, stood on the car seat, grabbed and leapt upwards.

"Oh—very pretty!" said Sama Paru admiringly.

Then she was nearing the roaring rotors, and all other sound was lost. Sama leaned over to help her inside. He grinned at her, pointing ahead.

"Would that be Mark?"

April peered into the golden light, shading her eyes to focus on the dark ground. She saw a man's figure against a rocky tor, with five silvery-clad figures closing on him.

Mark heard the Aston roar past. He had a busy ten minutes, dropping one guard and wounding another, when the gun jammed. He couldn't

reach his U.N.C.L.E. gun from under the gown, so he lifted the wounded man and flung him at the group emerging from the driveway, before speeding out of the hail into the opposite wing.

He reached an office where a woman in a white coat was peacefully sleeping.

"Pardon me!" he said as he stripped off the gown. He looked at the woman again, and shrugged. "Methinks you met the lovely April!"

He heard the guards crashing open doors, left the office, reached the room with the racks full of assorted items and whistled softly. Ideas clicked into his mind, but he had no time to formulate them. He missed the exit door and turned down the slope into a long, glow-lighted basement. It was full of Noddy bikes—little putt-putt scooters beloved by teenagers—and some older types. Clamped above each petrol tank was what appeared to be a reserve oil tank.

Mark recognized this as a container of K.S.R.6. A pipe ran through the bike frame from the container to a plastic water bottle, such as long-distance cyclists carry for glucose, fruit, or even plain drinking water.

"Pressure-filled," he muttered. "One little touch of this button and a solution of K.S.R.6 is sprayed sideways." He smiled grimly. "Imagine a gang of dolly-chicks in K clothing riding through a shopping centre pressing little buttons!" He touched the button. A fine mist spray squirted out. "Oh Gawd! There goes me flipping cash again!"

He spied another slope at the side, checked it, saw that it led up to the rear of the house. The up-and-over door wasn't locked. He swung it open, raced back, grabbed the first Noddy bike, then paused as he heard voices above him.

"It's Miss Ingrid! Looks like she's been drugged! You two—carry her to where Sam and Greco are. We'll get them all out of here."

Mark inspected the ceiling. The floorboards were old nine-inch-thick oak, part of the original house. Wide gaps between them let the sound of voices carry, yet the stoutness of the planks helped muffle footsteps. "We'll get them all out of here," the man had said. Mark glanced around him. "Why not?" he whispered. "What better way?"

Action sped on the heels of thought. He raced around the rows of Noddy bikes, turning on the petrol-tank taps. Soon the odor of loose petrol grew strong, and small iridescent pools oozed over the floor to join with others. Mark tested the compression on the bike he had

selected for himself, cast around for a suitable fuse, and found a wad of cotton waste on a workbench.

He kick-started his machine at the foot of the slope, flicking his lighter to the waste. As it flared he threw it as far as he could among the Noddy bikes, then roared up the slope, to emerge into a courtyard. He braked, skidded wildly and went, bucking-bronco fashion, legs lashing air, twice around the yard before he got the surprisingly fast little bike under control. As he passed a doorway, a man in a metal suit came out.

"How do!" said Mark, thrusting out a foot as he went by. The man fell back. Mark zoomed the Noddy bike through an open gateway and on to the moor. The track was actually no more than a footpath and Mark had driven some way along its curving length when he realized it led back to join the main track leading to the driveway. Through the trees he glimpsed silvery figures dashing from the house towards a Land Rover.

He swung the Noddy bike around and headed across the moor to a high section past two of the K.S.R.6 "ranges". He got past these okay, but the little Noddy didn't seem to care for heather, grass and peaty mud jamming up under the mud-guards of its tiny wheels. With a mechanical moan the drive-gear sheared, the engine seized. Mark shot gently off the saddle, to land on his ear.

He glanced back, and saw the Land Rover heading from the driveway and turning in his direction. He raced up the slope towards a large rock outcropping. As he climbed higher he could see down to the road, and for precious moments watched the speed duel between April's Aston Martin and the Jaguar.

"Good girl!" he muttered. Then he heard the helicopter. "Good old Sama!" He glanced back again. "And the hell with you lot!" he said, as the Land Rover bumped over the moor.

With his back to the rock he waited, gun ready. No sense in running any further. This golden light would fade soon, for already the moor was dark with shadow. Once beyond the rock on higher ground, he'd have as much chance as a pheasant against five or six guns. And not only guns. The moors looked lovely in this golden light. Like a woman full of promise, beckoning you to her scented embrace. And two men friends waiting behind the curtains with coshes. Shot, lost, stuck in a bog, or lying with a busted leg. Mark preferred the solid rock at his back and the gun in his hand.

He saw the helicopter sidle down to hover above the Aston Martin, saw the car jerking and slowing. He loosed a few accurately directed shots at the men who were now fanning out to surround him, having stopped their Land Rover on a hummock of soft ground. The range was almost at limit, but one of the men appeared to be hit in the arm.

A burst of fire from four guns spattered bullets near Mark. One or two spanged off boulders, but their range also was difficult. Suddenly came a bonanza! An orange-blue glow from the house basement sent eerie light waves over the darkening moor.

Mark's attackers turned as one man. The Jaguar careered off the road and turned over. The helicopter, ladder swaying, came tilting down towards him. The guards turned again in Mark's direction. The ladder swung down—end trailing backward.

Mark leapt, caught the third rung up, trapeze-spun his body to counteract the whip-lash effect of sudden weight, using the chopper's lift to climb swiftly up the rungs. In these seconds, the guards below him let loose a swathe of gunfire which pitted the rock face at what would have been stomach height. They swung to aim upward, but Sama Paru quickly dipped the chopper out of range.

As Mark reached the open hatch he looked down and back. The house on the moor was alight from end to end. An open truck was speeding away from it.

April had the night glasses to her eyes as Mark clambered into the chopper.

"They got her out," said April. "Sam and Greco too. Poor Ingrid!"

"I love you too," said Mark.

She grinned at him. "Firebug! I presume it was you?"

"Me and a few Noddys."

"A few what?"

"Forget it. Hi there, Sama!"

Sama Paru waved a hand. He was busy with radio contact as the chopper cleared the English coast.

"Where away?" said Mark.

"Le Havre." April tapped the bag.

"Ah! This is where we lose you to the boys in the back room. Do we recap about this little lot on yonder moor?"

"Not now. I'll see you in New York. This thing's only just begun. Sama wants to go to the help of Count Kazan."

"Without me?"

She patted his cheek. "You little boys go play while Momma does some homework."

"When Sama has finished his relay, I'd like to let Jeff know his Auntie's car is safe."

"You know the strangest people. I thought that super car was laid on by your British Special Branch friends?"

"So it was. Jeff's Auntie lives in Exeter. The old lady is a little mean. She doesn't like buying petrol. Did it run dry?"

"It did. *Old* Lady?"

Mark nodded. "The Duchess—they call her. I think she was a chum of Mata Hari. Jeff likes to make her feel she's wanted. The British S.B. boys don't run to Aston Martins. Besides, Jeff is a favorite nephew and Auntie can't last forever."

"How old is she, for Pete's sake?"

"I'm not sure whether it's seventy-two or eighty-two. Something like that."

"This will look bee-u-ti-ful in a report from S.B. to back up our expenses claim on U.N.C.L.E.!"

Sama Pam heard this last remark as he finished his radio contacts.

"Something else will look bee-u-ti-ful in your report," he observed. "Your London boys have lost Dr. Karadin—and his daughter. The clinic received a fake call in our code and released the girl. Karadin was picked up when he left his helicopter, but the squad car was rammed, the two guards coshed, and Karadin rescued."

"Oh, great!" said April. "Just great! Who runs the security back there?" She glared at Mark. "One of your Jeff's aunts?"

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE WRECKERS

OUTSIDE Le Havre they dropped April at the small heliport, where a car waited to take her to the laboratory.

"You'll contact Mr. Waverly?" said Mark. "And ask Paris to stand by? That will help us keep radio silence."

She nodded. "Watch yourself, lover boy. See you in New York."

"I hope so. And April, me old darling, try to have a quick word with Robbo in London and get him to send on my new gear, will you? I'm fresh out of new weskits."

She laughed. "Shame! Okay, I'll see what I can do. I've some clothes I need sending on too. 'Bye now!"

They watched her drive away. Sama Paru said:

"There goes one exceptional lady."

"Mmm," said Mark. "It's good English you speak, old boy, but deuced mild, if I may say so." Then he shrugged. "Not that I know any English words to really describe April Dancer." His manner became brisk. "Now—how about Kazan? Let's have some grub and take a look at maps while your chopper is being refueled."

"Ah!" said Sama. "The food and some rest are most necessary—but there is a night ban on helicopter flying, so we shall have to rest whether or not we need it."

"But it was dark when we flew in. The hell with bans."

"No, thank you," said Sama. "Choppers are easy targets for police bullets. I received permission to land by saying I had engine trouble over the Channel and could not turn back to England."

"I suppose you know your own red tape best. How about chartering a small plane?"

"By the time we get a plane it will be time to leave here. Kazan is somewhere among the forests back of the hills. A plane would not help us much. Not to worry, *mon ami*, it is the best way."

Mark didn't really regret the delay. Sama borrowed a tiny Renault car, drove like a demon for some six kilometers to a bistro where he was welcomed like a prodigal son by Madame and her three daughters. One was twelve and about to go to bed. The other two were of a more mature age. It was the most enjoyable night Mark had spent in a long while.

Sama Paru had known the family Lecheron since he was a boy. Adele and Lia shared an apartment in Paris, Adele, the eldest, working as a model, Lia still at University. They were a strangely happy family. Strange, because there was no bickering or jealousies which, in Mark's experience, usually beset families consisting only of women. Papa Lecheron had died two years ago.

Adele and Lia were on holiday from Paris and, apart from their company and the truly excellent meal, they gave Mark and Sama a hot lead in this affair of the Global Globules—as Mark now referred to it.

"Tin dresses?" said Sama Paru. "Tell us again."

Lia giggled. "It is so funny. A lot of the girls—they want to be models, like Adele, you see. But it is not all so easy and big fun like they think. It is very much training and long hours, and many jealousies and back-kicking."

"Biting," said Sama. "Back-biting."

"Ah yes—these English sayings! So, you see, it is all a dream with these girls."

"And no big money just for the asking," said Adele. She shrugged. "Oh! I do not complain. I have plenty of work, but it has taken a long time to become known. These stupid little innocents, they think all the couturieres—and, oh yes, the men—will fall over themselves to offer jobs and mink coats."

Lia roared with laughter. "So when a man chooses many of these girls and offers them big money, they all fall—plomp! They think of gorgeous gowns, and costumes and furs, and what do they model in? Tin dresses!"

Mark and Sama exchanged glances.

"An advertising agency, eh?" Mark suggested.

"Not advertising," said Adele. "They were picked by a—how you say?

—a big no-good. He is an agent, yes, but not for the real model business. The fringe man—very nasty."

"But he offered high fees—or payment of some sort?"

"In pieces," said Lia. "First he say: you model these dresses where we tell you. We pay you five thousand francs. These girls—their little eyes go pop and they sign the papers. Like a contract it is, and they receive one hundred francs and their ticket to Lyons or Chartres or Monte Carlo—lots of towns. Then they are paid another hundred when they wear these tin dresses. So they don't have five thousand francs in one big piece like they think."

"To Lia, it is a joke," said Adele. "And to me at first, because always there are these silly girls who call themselves models. But I think it is a bad joke. Some of these girls are in strange towns with little or no money. Some have not returned to Paris. Such business should be stopped, but there is no law against it, only—what is it you say?—expiation?"

"Exploitation," said Mark. "Are these girls trained, or told who are the buyers of these tin dresses?"

"Ah no—not trained," said Adele. "But one or two older girls—not so good girls, you know what I mean?—took these jobs, went away for a time. Training, they said, but they had plenty of money. And they have been taught to ride little motor bikes. I think perhaps these tin dresses might be a new kind of 'mod-gear', like they say in London."

Mark questioned them further, but they knew only a few first-hand facts and a great deal of rumor. He left for a while, saying he needed some fresh air, found a pay-phone and got through to the Le Havre laboratory.

April was annoyed at the interruption.

"This is going to take hours to crack—maybe weeks. Why are you still local?" She listened. "Oh, yes? Well, sorry I sparked off—this is certainly another angle. The chicks in Carnaby Street were a mixture of ga-ga teenagers kidding they were models and some hard-bitten floosies. There's a whale of a market all over for that mixture—a veritable army could be mobilized. This means there must be training and selection centers where the tough ones are picked, probably as leaders or local organizers."

"Separate centers from the distilling and testing and packing centers,"

Mark suggested.

"Well—those don't have to be very large. Moorfell could produce enough K.S.R.6 for a mammoth spraying fiesta. Any large country house in a quiet area subject to fogs, mists or above-average rainfall would do. But a training and selection center would attract more attention. I'm contacting Mr. Waverly at four a.m., our time. I'll pass this idea of yours to him. Is that all, Mark?"

"For now, for me—it's enough. The idea of thousands of bright young bints welded into a tin-dress army, captained by floosies, riding Noddy bikes through every town in the country scares the sanctimonious hell out of me! Cheerio, darling—be good and clever!"

"Aren't I always?"

"Yum!" He hung up, went back to the bistro, slept for an hour, then kicked Sama Paru awake. The chopper took off at first light. By sunrise it was over the olive hills behind the shimmering sea, slipping and wheeling for Mark to sight a suitable landing area.

They found the spot where Count Kazan had come down. The chopper was in a small clearing, its rotors leaning at an unusual angle. Efforts had been made to camouflage it by lacing leafy tree branches over it, but the blades peeped through enough to attract a searching gaze.

Mark said: "I think I sighted buildings among the trees. That must be near where Kazan last called in."

"Okay—I'll put down on that farm."

The farmer ran up as they climbed out, jabbering furiously. Sama Paru flashed money and the jabbering grew less explosive. When he produced more money, the farmer smiled a cracked smile. Then they conversed like old chums.

At last Sama turned to Mark "Yes, there is a hush-hush building in the woods," he said. Local rumors say it's a Government-research training center, but they are not curious around here." He grinned. "Not while someone at the center lays a wad of folding money in the local kitty. I have arranged transport."

"Comical," said Mark ten minutes later as they proceeded down a dusty-white lane on the back of a donkey. "Dead comical, you are, mate! Transport, you call this?"

"His car is broken down. His farm cart and horse delivering produce—what would you?"

"I would de-louse this brute for a start." Mark scratched several delicate places.

They parked the donkey at the edge of the woods, for Sama Paru had bought information not normally found on maps.

"Expensive, these small farmers," he observed. "How do I describe it on my expense sheet?"

"Local produce." Mark grinned. "If Karadin and his outfit succeed in this Globules affair, all you'll get is a wad of ugly money anyway! What the hell are you looking for?" he demanded as Sama moved, crouching, through the trees.

"Truffle tracks."

"Listen, chum—truffles and caviar come later." Mark hesitated. "Is this part of your pricey farmer's info?"

Sama nodded. "Better to follow his tracks than a clear patch. He says there are booby-traps—trip wires and such—over the main paths into the forest. We follow where he has found truffles. He marks the trees—see?" Sama pointed to a whitish nick in a nearby tree. "The farmer can go right up to the fence without their seeing him."

"So he's been truffle-picking and peeking?"

"Must have—he says lots of the girls sun-bathe. He seemed annoyed that they did it during milking time so he couldn't always get away from the farm. But they do some sort of training or practicing in silver dresses and trouser suits in the morning. They never come into the village. They have their own transport which takes them down to the coast."

"Well organized, huh?"

"It would seem to be so." Sama halted. "Look!" He parted the branches of thick bushes. A fence just beyond the bushes encircled a compound which had been smooth-layered with asphalt.

"Too early," Mark whispered. "Has Count Kazan got all his U.N.C.L.E. field agent's devices with him?"

"He should have."

"You've got yours?"

"Surely."

"Then call him up on the micro-transmitter—see if we can raise him. No sense making war palaver and rushing the dump if we can save time and effort."

Sama Paru operated the transmitter, while Mark used the waiting period by climbing high into a fir tree, from where he could look down on the layout. He used the U.N.C.L.E. micro-camera to good effect, obtaining full shots of the whole area. The early sun slanting through the clearing gave some high definition to his shots.

He rejoined Sama, who nodded, smiling.

"Count Kazan is on his way to join us. He broke out last night. Ssh!" They heard branches creaking. A twig snapped. Bushes away to their right quivered. Both drew their guns as sunlight glinted on a silvery figure.

"Hold it right there, tin-man!" said Mark, pushing through the bushes towards the figure.

"*Mon Dieu*!" exclaimed Count Kazan. "I am so glad to see you! Have either of you two gentleman got a can-opener?"

They stifled roars of laughter as he stood up, stiffly. His body bulged, perspiration streaming down his face. He was unshaven. Altogether, the elegant Count Kazan was not easy to recognize.

"I am in agony—and you laugh! It is not funny I have had a terrible time!"

"If you had to dress in that gear, couldn't you find one to fit you?" Mark chuckled.

"The suit fit," said Kazan. "They are very cleverly made and will adjust to all normal sizes. But I robbed their piggy bank. The suit is stuffed with money as well as me. There was no other way to carry it."

"Money! French money?"

"World money," said Kazan. "They print it on an underground press. Very pretty it is too. If you get me out of this, I will show you."

"No guards?" said Sama Paru.

"Not until eight o'clock. About thirty women are inside there. The men do not stay at night." Kazan grinned. "Many young girls, but all controlled by some of the hardest-faced witches you ever saw. With them around you do not need guards. *Those* have been trained by Sirdar the Turk. They are evil and ruthless—as only truly bad women can be."

"But you tamed 'em?" said Mark.

"I gassed the whole flock of little THRUSH birds," said Kazan. "Last night, with my gas gun, I was a busy bee. Then I injected each of the leaders. They will not wake up for many hours yet." He looked at them pleadingly. "Please—my friends—get me out of this before I stifle. The zip has stuck and the lever, she is bust."

The suit was beautifully made, the metal-like fabric bonded to a fine mesh of the same material. This mesh had a two-way-stretch weave. The only vulnerable part was the side zip which ran from thigh to armpit. The suit thus had to be put on sideways. Kazan had so stuffed the money around his body that the stretch was extended beyond normal use. He'd then forced up the zip so hard that he couldn't shift it. The suit was virtually indestructible and could not be torn.

They used Mark's lock-breaking tools to open the zip and soon had Kazan freed. The printed notes, each approximately the size of a hundred-dollar bill, were artistic though not fancy. These bore the THRUSH emblem dead centre with a sun-blaze effect of red-gold on a green background. A purple border at first sight looked like circles with filigree tailings of gold. Closer inspection showed these circles to be miniature imprints of a globe of the world. The denominations were from ten to ten thousand *esparas*.

"What the hell are *esparas*?" said Mark. "That's a country I've not heard of."

"The world," said Count Kazan. "*Esparas* are to be the new currency of the world of THRUSH."

Mark whistled softly. "Kid me not, my French comrade—you have proof?"

"In a file back there is the distribution arrangement for the whole of Europe. I have micro-filmed some."

"Let's go get the others. You feel better now?"

Count Kazan drew a deep breath. "Much better."

"Right. Stow some of this cash in your pockets. Wrap the rest in the suit. Hide that under the bush and let's go blow this thing—fast."

They ignored the dormitory of sleeping girls and the separate rooms of the unconscious overseer women, although they first checked on these females. But they wasted no time on them.

Mark said: "Quick and rough. We've no time to tangle if we can help it. H.Q. has to have this stuff as soon as we can rush it to them."

They were three very experienced wreckers. Files were blown open, contents packed into a few handy-sized boxes which once held banknote paper. They took samples of this and rammed the rest in the basement furnace. Samples of inks and the plates were carefully packed, telephone wires, radar and TV sets and cables wrecked beyond any chance of repair.

The press was a superb piece of machinery controlled by a small computer. Count Kazan complained:

"A beautiful sculpture, the sculptured beauty of a woman, and a beautifully created machine—to me they are all God's work, my friends. It makes me sad to have to destroy this. Did you ever see such perfection of design? Swiss, of course. Where else can you get such craftsmanship? And the computer—American, naturally. Who else could produce such an electronic marvel? Now—we place a small explosive charge here, and here, and there. We insert this metal bar and rip apart the frame and carrier. Mark Slate deguts the computer, crushing its tiny contacts underfoot. Soon it will all be gone—pouff!"

"And pouff to you too!" said Mark. "Set that charge and let's go."

"I need violence," said Kazan. "I want to crush and kill the men who made this necessary. Let us await the men and smash them too."

"They'll be smashed," said Mark. "We've no time to stay and be heroes. Maybe your H.Q. will send you in with the clean-up detail. Right?"

Count Kazan shrugged. "It is right."

"Charge set," said Sama Paru. "All the boxes are out side. How much time have we got?"

Kazan checked his watch. "Nearly an hour."

Mark took the wires they had rigged from cable found in the basement. "Let's go." He thrust a wire through one window, let it trail, put the other through the next window.

In the compound he gathered one in each hand. They crouched below window level. Mark touched the wires together.

The blast blew out the window with such force that the shattered pieces went clear beyond them.

Mark stood up and peered inside.

Count Kazan said: "An efficient wrecking job."

Mark nodded. "Well judged. Hasn't brought even a spot of plaster off the ceiling. The ladies sleep undisturbed."

Sama Paru said: "I have my choice of sleeping beauties and all I do is run away. This is a hard life!"

Mark pulled out his U.N.C.L.E. communicator. "This is Mark Slate. Channel D. Hear me! Mark Slate from France. Hear this!"

When he had concluded his report, they gathered up the boxes, collected Count Kazan's suit from the bush, and were surprised to see the donkey waiting for them as they came hurrying from the trees.

"Oh, no!" Kazan wailed. "This is too much! I will never live it down!" He refused to ride on the beast although Sama offered to walk. Instead, he ran with the donkey all the way to the farm.

"A man's dignity," said Count Kazan, "is like a woman's virginity—you either have it or you don't. There is no compromise."

CHAPTER NINE: OPERATION PHAGOCYTE

"GIBBERISH," said Mr. Waverly in his office at New York headquarters, "is for the gibberers. A report containing enough figures of formula construction to fill three text books is extraordinary clever and I hope somebody receives a great deal of money for it." He tapped his pipe-stem on a folder in front of him. "Our French-based scientists excelled themselves. So have their American colleagues who, in words

we not only can understand but act upon, have translated, condensed, extracted, collated the French and English reports and come up with the following."

He peered across the console at April Dancer and Mark Slate.

"Pardon me for overlooking the courtesy, but did you both enjoy your holiday in England?"

April and Mark exchanged glances. April sighed gently.

"Delightful, thank you, Mr. Waverly."

Mark murmured: "How kind of you to ask! We had a wonderful two hours!"

"So glad, so glad. Now..." He began filling another pipe. "Salient facts: K.S.R.6 is undoubtedly a fluid designed to attack all known banknote paper and has an affinity with the dyes and inks used in such printing processes. It will penetrate all clothing, leather, etcetera, and, as an invisible vapor, will or can enter bank vaults, locked safes, cash boxes —and junior's piggy bank.

"This chemical has been isolated." He glanced across at them. "A delightfully ambiguous phrase, is it not? It is the experts' way of saying, 'We have an idea what it may be, but not one hope in the hereafter of saying exactly what it is, although we know the group to which it belongs'. In other words—somebody is a lot cleverer than we are, so please catch him before he makes monkeys out of us.

"I think they took fourteen pages to say that. But the results of their dispersal tests are more to the point. After all, our concern is: how, when and where. We know why. Globules of K.S.R.6, when fired into natural rainfall, or under misty or foggy conditions, become suspended in the water. They are not washed away. The actual K.S.R.6 becomes activated when the water dries out. This activation takes the form of an invisible vapor against which only a metal-like material is effective.

"This material is a mixture of fiberglass, exploded chrome dust and a bonding agent. The dresses and suits bear no stitching. They are hot to wear although very light, but a gadget for conditioning the apparel is used when it is to be worn for any length of time. It is not possible to make this material within the foreseeable future unless the original formula is discovered. As in the formula for K.S.R.6, it is not the ingredients which confuse us but the method of manufacture.

"A later report after further tests shows that K.S.R.6 *can* be dispersed in chain-reaction globules in dry conditions. These will dowse a given area with concentrated spray as they burst. In these conditions, the K.S.R must be dispersed under pressure not less than six feet, not more than forty feet from ground level. Fast-moving machines, such as small motor bikes, would be ideal because pressure of air against the globules as they are released from the nozzle of a pressurized container would give maximum effect."

"More so with cars?" Mark asked.

"I thought that, but it appears not to be so. There is an aerodynamic effect caused by a car's shape which would possibly sweep them upward, thus causing much wastage of the globules. It would be most helpful if this brilliant invention could be used only by massive equipment, or even large pop-guns—anything that is different.

"Unfortunately the objects which can be adapted for use as dispersal units for K.S.R.6 are things we see all around us in every street and shop. Miss Dancer's report on the test items she discovered in the house on Dartmoor gives good examples: such as street signs, lamp posts, awning, barbers' pole signs. In fact, almost anything can be adapted, even personal sprays, such as aerosol cans labeled Fly Killer, Hair Lacquer, etcetera.

"You will see that even though we may cover every street and shop in every town, we cannot hope to trace and destroy dispersal units. And a comparatively small number of people could fix these units. We should need the Army, Navy, Air Force, and every Boy Scout in the Universe to discover them."

Mr. Waverly paused. "By the time we did so, the whole of the United States' monetary system would be in chaos—as would those of other countries. Financial anarchy will take over. The banknote paper, samples from France and their inks and dyes, are impervious to K.S.R.6. Our scientists are working all-out to break this formula and devise an antidote—either in the paper and printing processes or as a prophylactic solution. But we cannot wait for them. We believe Dr. Karadin took the better part of twenty years to create K.S.R.6. We haven't got much more than twenty hours.

"Already the reports are becoming more numerous. Security is as tight as a drum-skin. Not one leak to the press. All countries are cooperating—except certain ones whose interests are not ours. But there have been several cases of panic. In two small mid-West towns

there was a run on the banks. One had to close its doors. And these areas, we believe, were merely sample areas, trial runs—like London's Carnaby Street, the Rue Rivoli in Paris, a casino in Monte Carlo, supermarkets in a hundred provincial towns.

"Mr. Kuryakin is in India. He reports five incidents. Mr. Solo is in Australia. He reports four incidents. A pattern is emerging. How many more testing and trial areas are to come? From whence is the major assault to be launched? We believe it is right here in the United States. With this country in financial chaos, the rest of the Western world will follow us into the abyss.

"Dr. Karadin is in this country—so is his daughter."

Mark grinned at April "Seems like someone else's Auntie boobed, me old darling."

"Auntie?" said Mr. Waverly. "Is that a joke, Mr. Slate?"

"A little-boy one," said April sweetly. "But it does contain a question as to how these two people were allowed into the country."

Mr. Waverly coughed gently. "Owing to the weakness of certain of my agents to play important international inquiries as they would play cards—close to their respective chests—we did not receive sufficient warning in time to alert all entry points. They did, in fact, enter by a devious route, quite openly, but with their passports stamped as arriving from Brazil. They now have disappeared."

"I had the feeling..." April began, then: "I'm sorry, sir, you were saying?"

"If I say I respect your feelings, that would not be what I mean. If on the other hand, your 'feeling' means one of your quite alarming and often accurate hunches—please go on, Miss Dancer."

She smiled. "Well, I don't have proof, but I do feel that the centers we found in England and France were gearing up, or had actually geared up, to a final phase. Tests and training were nearly complete. The K.S.R.6 solution—processed under a copy-system of the Parsimal Theory—could be produced by any competent junior laboratory assistant. The filling machine is so simple it could be worked by a child. The K.S.R.6 does not require elaborate buildings, nor any large storage capacity. Sizes of the containers vary from the size of a matchbox to a motor-bike oil tank, or a fire-extinguisher refill. In fact, the kitchen or basement of any normal dwelling could be a production

unit. So I believe that all preliminary work was done in Europe, because although this country has vast open areas, our authorities are extremely alert to any place being used for any scientific purpose. Our people, generally, also are more alert to anything which might be operated against them. It is coincidence that Mr. Slate and I found these leads to Dartmoor and France—not forgetting our European contact men—at the time when Dr. Karadin and the higher echelons of his organization were almost ready to leave for America. It is here that the major effort will be made. Once under way, then Europe, Australia, India—all other areas—will be triggered off."

Mr. Waverly nodded. "I would agree with most of that, Miss Dancer. We all know how very difficult it will be to uncover centers which are in normal houses. But there must be some storage capacity beyond any you found in Europe, and surely to cover our big cities will require stockpiling of containers of K.S.R.6?—in warehouses or other large buildings?"

"April is right," said Mark. "There may be large numbers of operators engaged in the whole project, but small groups on fast little machines could zip through New York almost in a day, This K.S.R.6 stuff doesn't need to be pumped out by the gallon, does it?"

"No," said April "On a rainy day they would require surprisingly little. And we must remember that in many towns they may not need to be mobile. In fact, their agents may already be working on street signs, traffic lights, lamp posts—a whole host of ordinary dispersal points. These attachments—or even street signs containing them—can be put up by people who'd attract no attention, such as window cleaners, street-lighting maintenance men, sign erectors, painters."

"Whilst we are looking only for dollies in tin dresses?' said Mr. Waverly. "Or even men in metal suits?"

"They bother me," said Mark. "The rest of the K.S.R.6 plot is terrifyingly simple. Why complicate it by using such costumes? They're a dead give-away. We can surely round up every person wearing such clothes?"

"I think there are two good reasons," said April. "The first is technical. Continual exposure to the globules of K.S.R.6 at the time of dispersal —that is, before they vaporize—will cause severe dermatitis. A concentration of vapor will cause irritation and some peeling similar to sunburn. The second is that these suits protect all paper money."

"So do their wallets and purses," said Mark. "Why not use only those?"

"I think the third reason is largely psychological." April smiled. "In all massive demonstrations by power-seekers—as in justice—it must not only be done but be seen to be done. They expect us to react, and it will be difficult to avoid publicity. The witch hunt will be on. Every person in a metal suit will be grabbed off the street. But everyone's money will melt just as fast. You'll never stop the panic."

Mark nodded. "Because the stuff will be spraying all over them from street signs and other points. They'll carry it into the banks, shops, offices—their homes—and not know it."

Mr. Waverly said: "Part of the reports stress that areas with high rainfall—especially those subject to heavy mists and fogs—are ideal places for testing K.S.R.6. The atmospheric tolerance is an important factor."

"Yes," said April. "Part of that was in my report. Mist, fog and air moisture was the plus factor at Dartmoor. But they now have perfected K.S.R.6. Those conditions may not be so vital."

Mr. Waverly rose from his chair. "Let us go into the map room. Mr. Kovac has been given a small assignment. We will see what he can surprise us with." He rippled his pipe stem up the edges of the stacked files. "Nobody else has done so. We really must get rid of this mountain of paper work." He looked at Mark "Oh, by the way, Mr. Slate—isn't ten thousand francs a trifle excessive for local produce in France?"

"Well, sir, they produce banknote paper and—er—sleeping models in that part of the world."

"Ah! Quite so. We also have a claim for fifteen gallons of petrol, plus car hire from our British friends. I gather the mileage was something under a hundred. But perhaps we don't use the same route maps?"

"High-speed running," said April. "A very powerful car. My fault, I'm afraid. I ran the tank dry."

Mr. Waverly nodded sympathetically. "Yes, fast driving does run away with the gas. And Dr. Karadin wasn't courteous enough to pay for your lunch in the Post Office Tower restaurant?"

Mark flickered a grin at her. He said to Mr. Waverly:

"You wouldn't expect her to be false to her career-woman image, would you? You don't take the little woman out to lunch today, y'know. In this shining new world it's the woman who always pays—or was that what Gladstone said in 1886?"

"I wouldn't know, Mr. Slate," said Mr. Waverly dryly. "I hope that when Miss Dancer receives her expenses voucher she will duly compensate you for your support."

"I doubt it," said Mark. "She never has."

"In my young days," said Mr. Waverly as they entered the map room, "we had a sense of honor about such things."

"Ouch!" said April, then smiled brightly. "Hullo, Randy!"

"Hullo, old son!" said Mark. "Rescued any good agents lately?"

Randy grinned hugely. He had been bubbling ever since he had known they were on their way back, clock-watching at home, wondering what excuse he could make for calling in at H.Q. when it wasn't really his period for reporting, saying to himself: "They're just about boarding the aircraft. Now they're in mid-Atlantic."

Then the phone had rung. "Ah! Mr. Kovac!" Mr. Waverly was casual—a sure sign of pressure. The greater the crisis, the more casual, it seemed, he became. "If you could spare the time there is some work you could do for me before Miss Dancer and Mr. Slate arrive. You have been aware of this Global Globules nonsense from the start. So perhaps a follow-through session will be good experience for you. Yes—as soon as you like."

Randy Kovac became jet-propelled. He almost bounced off the U.N. building which towered over the street of the small tailor shop, so directly did he speed to H.Q. At last he was on an assignment! He, Randy Kovac, would be there when his two "ideals" arrived! At least he'd take darn good care he was there!

Some of the steam went out of his bubbles when he found that his assignment was a boring repetition of much of the work he'd already done in plotting, mapping and cross- referencing the Globule incidents in America. But the follow-through work set his already lively imagination ablaze.

If April Dancer was an intuitive, or hunch follower, Randy Kovac was a super-plus-intuitive. He was inspired by hero-worship, plus career-

drive, plus sublime belief that he couldn't fail, plus the Irish blood in him that held the blessed strain of unending faith in "the little people", and the grace and favor of generations of Irish luck.

"Fine!" said Randy Kovac in what he hoped was a normal voice. "Just fine!" But in trying to be normal, his voice persisted in going way up, then way down again, his brain feathery light despite the long hours spent checking and cross-checking his own theory. He was nervous of Mr. Waverly, though, because many of those hours of work hadn't been as routine as perhaps they should have been. "I read the reports you gave me, sir."

"That was the object of giving them to you, Mr. Kovac."

"Yes, sir—well, I did, and..." He pressed the map-screen switch. "Here is the first breakdown of incidents. No pattern, you will see." He pressed the switch again. "Here is the breakdown of high-rainfall and air-moisture areas superimposed."

"Very pretty," said April. "You're an excellent cartographer."

Randy beamed. Mr. Waverly grunted. Mark flicked up an eyebrow. "Is this your idea?"

"Mr. Waverly told me to follow through on natural sequence. I thought maps were better than reams of typing."

"Is this all you have accomplished?" demanded Mr. Waverly.

"No, sir." Randy made like a magician as he again pressed the map-screen switch. "Here is a breakdown of arid areas."

"Arid!" Mr. Waverly exclaimed sharply. "That was not in your terms of reference, Mr. Kovac. You have spent valuable time on something you were not asked to do."

"Please, sir—may I give my reasons?"

"I'm sure he has good ones," said April, little realizing that the words would turn a likeable young man into her slave for life, not being that intuitive... Or was she?

"The reports, sir." Randy's voice trembled with eagerness. "From Europe especially, as well as later ones from far continents—they all emphasized rain areas. But K.S.R.6 wouldn't be an effective weapon if it had to rely on rain showers or mists. And what about areas of low

rainfall?—deserts and arid areas? We have those in the States. I assumed that K.S.R.6 was tested in areas like Dartmoor. That would be natural. It wasn't heavily defended. Miss Dancer reports her opinion that the operation there was in terminal phase. It also would be natural for us to assume that main centers in this country would be in such areas. They would expect us to assume that."

"Between your assumptions and Miss Dancer's opinions should be placed a crystal ball," said Mr. Waverly severely. "I asked for follow-through summaries on which we could base action."

"With respect, sir," said Randy quietly, "we have plenty of facts to summarize as to methods and effects, and I have completed those. But we do not have any on possible centers, except reports based on assumptions."

"Touché, Mr. Kovac." Mr. Waverly's eyes suddenly twinkled. "Explain further, if you will, this departure from your instructions."

Randy switched in a graph plate. It looked like a transparent map of air routes with dots linking the cities and areas where incidents had been reported. One outstanding fact was obvious. The lines all crossed at the same point.

"Little Basin Desert, Arizona," said Randy, putting his finger on that crossing point. "Arid, very low humidity. Little Basin is an almost circular depression between hills and rocky buttes. It has been drilled for water. That operation cost as much as the purchase price of the whole lot. It is a Health Farm. At one time it was a Dude Ranch. It has been owned for nearly ten years by Healthfare Incorporated. Healthfare is associated with various health clubs through out the world, but mainly in Europe, where bronchitis and similar chest complaints are prevalent. Patients visit Little Basin from all over Europe. It is forty-three miles from the nearest town."

"You are proving that you spent the hours working," said Mr. Waverly. "Your summary is most interesting. So is the assumption that because all lines between the incident areas cross at that one point—it must mean something on which we can act."

April hunched forward, chin on hands.

"He means, stick your neck out, Randy! Sell it us as a proposition."

"I've heard worse," said Mark. "But it's a trifle airy-fairy, old lad."

"This isn't," said Randy. "Healthfare is associated with Société L'Art de Guerir—The Art of Healing Company—of Paris. Founder member and now Director-General is Dr. Carl Karadin. His associates are Georges Sirdar..."

"Sirdar the Turk!" April exclaimed.

"Ah! You know him?" Randy clicked his fingers. "Yes, of course—the organizer of the muscle men."

"What others?" said Mark briskly.

"Suzanne Karadin—she makes the third French director. Then there is S. L. Coke (British), L. Mancini (Italian), Brunnard T. Raver (American) and M. Nicorious (Greek)."

"And you got all that from drawing lines?" said April. "You are a very clever young man."

"Come into my office," Mr. Waverly snapped. He turned and hurried away.

Randy looked puzzled. Mark patted his shoulder. "Not to worry, old boy—methinks the fairies are on your side!"

As they joined him, Mr. Waverly said: "Sit down, Mr. Kovac, sit down."

Randy trod air, savoring this delicious moment of dream-come-true—lovely dreams of Mr. Waverly sending for Mr. Kovac's brilliant self, saying: "Sit down." Juniors didn't sit down. Top agents did—in fact, all top people—but not juniors. Randy eased gently down as if testing a hot bath.

Mr. Waverly was on the direct Washington line. They couldn't hear what he was saying because he spoke through the cowl sound diffuser attached to his earphones. As he waited for replies to his long conversation, he glanced at Randy.

"That was the sum-total of your follow-through, Mr. Kovac?"

"Yes, sir—er—except..."

"Cough it up, laddie," said Mark. "You're in to your ears already. We can only shoot you once."

Randy gulped. "Well, sir—I didn't have authority to phone Paris."

"I bet you tried!" April chuckled.

"The operator wouldn't put me through. I had to work through our foreign department. I wanted to find out what other business the French company owned. We could only find one."

"A couturiere?" said April.

Randy beamed at her. "That's right—only I couldn't pronounce it properly. The Healthfare Company own 'Dorés'—a fashion shop on the Rue Rivoli. How did you guess that?"

"You'll learn in this fascinating game of ours that one little 'click' sets off lots of other 'clicks'," she assured him. "They build up to a big bang if you keep clicking on the right lines. Like your lines clicking to a center. See what kept clicking after it? So it clicks with me that some expert dressmaker, tailor or, as in France, a couturiere establishment must make up that metal-dress gear. Someone they had control of—not a contract job."

Mr. Waverly held up his hand for silence. They waited. At last he removed the head stall and swung around to face them.

"The password is PHAGOCYTE."

April tapped her forehead with a knuckle and frowned.

"Something meaning ... guarding the system against infection by absorbing microbes." She laughed. "Very neat."

Mr. Waverly inched a smile at her.

"Are we not? So now—let us to work." He looked at Randy Kovac. "You will remember we are a team, Mr. Kovac. No one person is greater, or lesser, than that team. The discovery of one part is the discovery of all parts leading to a conclusion of the whole by the whole. In this context we each have one moment of glory. Let us assume you have had yours. All responsibility for it is now lifted from you. But we shall not forget that moment. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Right," said Mr. Waverly. "We will pass to the action briefing room. Operation Phagocyte has already commenced."

CHAPTER TEN: KEEP FINGER OFF BUTTON!

WHAT began as a hunch became an open bluff which led to an assignment, which in turn erupted into an international project. From such small beginnings do world wars escalate. All who worked for and with the U.N.C.L.E. organization never lost sight of this possibility. Its agents were, of course, constantly at war. They lived with its menace, saw the dangers in many seemingly ordinary incidents in all parts of the world which could, if linked together, form a pattern of destruction on an international scale.

As highly trained, skilled and experienced agents they were trusted and given wide latitude. At their back stood the vast defense machine of their country and the world network of associates and similar organizations with whom it worked. But at all times they were individuals. They did not march in formations. They did not wear uniforms. They did not salute superior ranks. They combined the freedoms of the buccaneering adventurer with the calculating brain of the modern espionage agent and the discipline of the finest service personnel.

To an outsider they might appear casual, or even irresponsible. They were disrespectful in many attitudes towards their respective establishments. They suffered the small irritations of administration departments, such as querying footling items on expense sheets, with tolerant good humor, but fools who sabotaged their sometimes desperate efforts in the field were blatantly derided or ignored, no matter what their Civil Service rank. All top agents possessed an intuitive sense sharpened by often bitter experience, so in many instances could not file in triplicate a report that would satisfy a chair-borne general.

They tried not to break civil laws, but of necessity had to "bend" many in the interests of that greater and over riding "law of national preservation". Thus all their efforts were sublimated to defense of country, which itself was a defense of world peace. And at times, the only form of defense is attack.

General assignment agents tried always to work from within the enemy areas, to infiltrate, to sabotage local activities, to link the improbable with the possible and break the power of an encircling movement. Divide and rule is an old maxim. U.N.C.L.E. agents often divided local power groups, splitting them so that they could more easily be destroyed, so weakening and finally snapping the power of

their leaders.

Action begets action. What was seen in a London street moved through personal contacts to violent destruction on an English moorland, thence to a French forest. Escalation of action was a natural result, always so for agents such as April Dancer, Mark Slate, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin. Enforcement officers might be their official title, back here at Del Floria's tailor shop in the brownstone house under the shadow of the United Nations building. But from a London street to a New York street—the hunch had come home, to where the ultimate danger lay somewhere in an Arizona desert.

With all forces alerted it was inevitable that the administration should conform to "procedure" that almost biblical word voiced unctuously along with the well-beloved phrase "usual channels". Insert a two-letter word—by—and you have the awe-filling phrase—"procedure by usual channels". Lengthily translated this means: "There are one helluva lot of us guys being paid one helluva lot of money and we are all going to put our itchy noses into this affair and shall require one helluva lot of memos duly signed, counter-signed, classified and passed to you for urgent attention, before we can move one goddamn man, tank, plane, troop carrier, gun, gas bomb, radio, scout car or portable latrine."

Which was one reason why April Dancer and Mark Slate sat on an olive-sage hill in the hot, dry olive-sage area of Little Basin, Arizona.

"Mr. Alexander Waverly is a one-man bomb on his own," said April Dancer. "He doesn't explode for little men—only for the biggest—but even he is going to be taxed severely before Operation Phagocyte comes to life in terms of men, men, men."

"Same the world over, old girl." Mark Slate stretched in the sun. "Once the admin and service wallahs are called in, all the little men become pompous big men. Don't see how you can ever avoid it. The machine runs the men who are employed to run it. Once they get moving, all hell won't stop it. That's how they lose thousands of men in an attack. I've seen it happen. Nice words they give the poor dead devils too—expendable, they say: strategy, they say: the escalation of the overall plan, they say. What they mean is that some theory-ridden old red-tab back at his comfy H.Q. forgot he had those units stuck over there by the green pin on the map board. Wars have got too big, me old darling. Was a time when the general was way out in front—leading 'em. Now, there are nearly as many generals and admirals at the back of the poor expendable so-and-sos." He sat up suddenly. "Which same

is us, right now."

April grinned. "I wondered when you were going to wake up to that fact. Well, at least the F.B.I. should be in a position by now. Drat this radio silence."

"How else can we get close? They've no phone down there in the nut hatch. Must be well linked with radio—maybe radar too." Mark glanced at his watch. "Better start preparing for the Stutter Beam relay, That was cool thinking on your part." He chuckled. "Space Research didn't like it one little bit when they learned you knew all about their precious Stutter Beam. By the way—how *did* you know?"

She made no reply until they had taken out the collapsible equipment from their shoulder packs and begun to open it up in the shade of a rock overhang.

"People call it stutter because it does—in laser light beams. But it's the invention of a man named Gabriel Stuttar—who, by merest chance, is my godfather. He's an old sweetie. It was he who encouraged me to keep on with my career." She gazed at Mark as she squatted back on her haunches. "We hear so much about our brilliant young men—and we have them, sure we do. It'd be a poor old world without them. But we have the others, too."

"What others?"

"Gabby Stuttar, for one. When he was a young man—one of the brilliant young men, I suppose he'd be called—his ideas of using laser light and a translation receiver were laughed at. Now it's top secret—one of the marvels of the age—yuck! yuck! He began it thirty years ago—now it's so secret he doesn't even rate his picture in the papers."

"Money?" said Mark.

She shrugged. "All he wants—now he doesn't really need it. Pride, he's got. Oh yes, human vanity too. One good headline, one TV interview, one award as the scientist of the year—maybe a Nobel. Won't get 'em though. Top secret—poor old duck!" She patted the small, camera-like object fixed on its swivel-topped tripod. "Thirty years, and here's us—taking for granted it'll work."

"Well, we know it will, old girl. The space boffins have proved it down to the nth. Can't be tapped, bugged or otherwise tampered with."

"Yes, but don't you see? Oh! Skip it! The sun must be softening me."

She grinned. "And there's Carl Karadin too. A bit ironic, don't you think? Right now we're gearing up to smash him. And we'll do it because we have to. Twenty years ago he was branded a nutcase. A world currency was his bug and it bit him deep, deep. So deep that he worked for twenty years to perfect a way of destroying all paper currency and replacing it with a world currency. Yet even now, the finance wizards of the world are trying to work out ways of doing that very thing—a transfer to a world currency."

Mark nodded. "Crazy—just crazy! Ours not to reason why—eh, old girl?" He checked his watch again. "Nearing zero."

They donned glasses, oval-shaped, with contoured side pieces an extension of the three-colored lenses. Vertical stripes of purple, orange and green with an opaque sheen on the convex surfaces. The timing and translation controls on the receiver were set to prearranged figures and the lenses lined on a compass bearing.

Each took a cylinder from a padded pouch in their assault belt, about the size of a two-cell hand torch but larger at its base and sloping to a tiny aperture. A thumb-press, a red safety switch and a recessed gun site were the only breaks in its shiny black surface.

They checked watches again. Mark began to count down from ten to zero. "... five, four, three, two, one!"

At that second there appeared in the sky over forty miles away a series of stuttering flashes, as if sunlight was being reflected off the windshields of fast-moving cars. But through the three-colored lenses, each flash could be seen as a different shape. Some shapes repeated themselves more often than others. The relay moved at fantastic speed —so fast that whole words appeared as if some celestial type writer was impressing keys on to the hazy blue paper of the sky.

April and Mark vied with each other in their attempts to read the messages, but the phonetic alphabet used by the Laser Beam Sender had not yet been included in their curriculum and they only managed to decipher a few words in every sentence.

When the relay ceased, they both sent two long and two short flashes into the sky from their own hand beams. It took about five seconds for these flashes to reach the relay area, where they exploded into phonetic letters spelling "okay".

As they removed their glasses, Mark said:

"The range test was impressive. I'm going to have a test of my own."

"Careful," April warned.

"They won't be able to see anything from way down there."

"I didn't mean that, you oaf!"

He smiled at her. "I'll remember your concern for me—in the right place." He moved the red switch, lifted the recessed gun site on the torch body, took aim at a smallish rock some hundred yards away and pressed the button.

The rock exploded with a dull crack. Pulverized stone spurted up in a fan-shaped arc. When it had settled, only a faint depression remained where the rock had been.

Mark moved the safety-catch to "off". They looked at each other steadily, silently. April shivered slightly, then stooped over the laser beam receivers. She opened the slide panels and drew out the purple-orange-green striped film. Mark did the same.

"We could have saved one," said Mark. "But orders is orders. We might have been separated at the time."

On the films were the messages, translated into ordinary words. These read:

"Move in dusk. All forces position 1800 hours. Target area sealed. Avoid or destroy hazards. No wrecking. Repeat: no wrecking. We cover but avoiding inter-in. Delicate."

"Once the department boys get into the act they start pussy-footing around," said April. "Why try to avoid an international incident when the whole darn caboodle down there is directed against all of us?"

Mark shrugged. "The F.B.I. claim that large numbers of genuine foreign nationals—sick people—do actually come to Little Basin. That's why we can't just march on the place. You know how dicey these inter-ins can be. The dipsomatic boys have nightmares about agents shooting one foreign national who is under their protection—which same these sick people are."

"Phooey!" said April. "Sick people might have checked in there one time—when Karadin was building up a front—but not now."

"Don't be bloodthirsty, darling. Read on."

She read on:

"Retreat and contact if infiltration impossible. Major attack set-up discovered Chicago. Suspect others. Keep finger off button. Good luck. A. W."

"Ah—that's better!" said April. "A far more valid reason for no-wrecking attack."

"I think A. W. was pacifying the dipsomatic boys."

"Do you mind not mispronouncing that word? Some of my best friends are diplomats."

"Gertcha!" said Mark. "Most of my best friends aren't. Let 'em be friends with each other—there are enough of them. They don't speak our language, me old darling."

"This finger-off-button bit means that A. W. must be dead sure that Little Basin is their American H.Q."

"And the Chicago bit means even more," said Mark. "With all forces alerted, it's possible they've picked up some lesser agent in Chicago. Maybe more than one. Lesser agents crack easy."

"But they don't always know much."

"Only who tells them to do what, and when."

"So?"

"So A. W. and our Government pals may have cracked the Global Globules alarm system. There won't be anything casual about the way their project swings into major action. To do the greatest harm in the shortest time, they'd have to synchronize the blast-off of their blasted spray—a one-button job for certain."

April nodded pensively. "And dat is down dere?" She pointed.

He chuckled. "Dat is. Tell you something else—dere is someone over dar." He pointed to further around the hills. "I seen him bobbing behind a rock."

"A peeping Tom?"

Mark looked at her, one eyebrow flicked up. "You're kidding, of course?"

She looked away. "Well, I mean—we're not what people might think, and—"

He grabbed her, held her tight. "Darling—you're really human! Let's give Tom an eyeful he won't forget."

She stared at him calmly, her face close to his. She kissed him gently, then said softly:

"Let go of me, you over-sexed rat, or I'll clobber you!"

"At last!" he cried. "At last, the real woman emerges from her glossy career cage!" He too kissed her gently. "You're a sweet bitch. Keep looking over my shoulder."

She lay still. "Yes—yes, I saw a movement. Ah! He's gone now—scuttled up and over the brow of the hill."

Mark looked back and released her. "Now who? Not one of our friends, surely? And it's a powerful long hike from the valley to where he was, so we'd have seen him." Mark pulled out the range glass and twisted the bevel for focus. "He's gone right enough. It's a great big lonely world out there." He switched to the sprawled cluster of buildings below them. "No activity. Strange, y'know. Not seen a soul outside ever since we got here. There's movement inside—can just see shadows through the screens over those picture windows. What is it—off-season for nut hatches?"

She held out her hand for the glass, then laughed. "They must have heard you!"

"I can see them—not to identify though. They look like women."

"They're not," said April firmly. "They're dressed like women, but they're husky men." She lowered the glass, then looked at Mark. "Could be they have spotted us and are putting on a show?"

"Not a chance. We were here before dawn. We've built a natural stone rampart, plus the cover that scrub further down must give us against anyone looking up here." He tapped his chest. "Plus these desert-camouflage track suits which blend perfectly against the background. Why, I couldn't even spot you when I reccied along the ridge." He paused before adding: "But chummy-boy over there might have set

them off."

"Set them off on what?"

Mark pointed downwards. "If that nut hatch *was* genuine, there would be people resting on the patios, others taking the air, some using the pool—there's an awning over it to protect invalids from the sun. And where are the staff? It's a lovely place down there. Lush and beautifully laid out. Wouldn't there be even one single person with business or pleasure outside the building? There are stables beyond the pool and a carport full of cars and pick-up trucks. Yet no one to tend the horses? No car needing checking? No, me old darling—something set 'em moving, and I think it was young chummy on the hill yonder. He was wearing dark clothes."

"Young?"

"The way he scarpered over the Beecham—yes."

"Speak English, you limey half-wit!"

"Scarpered, darling—ran. Beecham—as in Beecham Pill hill. They call it rhyming slang. Very useful."

"Not now. The only useful thing I need is a way in to that lush oasis without setting off their goddamn button."

Mark leaned back, relaxed.

"With you little eye, can you spy a gee-gee?"

"A number of them in stables—the top halves of the doors are open."

"I have a way with gee-gees. I think I smell good—a sort of inner cleanliness."

"Skip the commercial."

"Devices are for alarm—yes?"

She shrugged. "I've known some killers—booby traps."

"But not down there."

"Oh no? Flower beds, lawns, curving paths—we won't know how to avoid them. That dirt road from the highway must be all of eight miles, but I'd say there'd be alarms every mile."

"But not killers."

"If it was me, I'd wire the patio too," she said thoughtfully. "That would leave the path around the perimeter fence, past the corrals and the carports and on to the stables. Now where would I booby that? I'd let us get in—some way in—then I'd rig them across that open area. Hmm—can't see what's at back of the main building. Doesn't really matter. Our shortest line for entry is at the side." She moved her head and the range glass back and forth. "Yep—through or over the fence, along the outer path, past the stables, cut across at the edge of the pool. Three leaps and we're under a window."

"They won't be killers," said Mark.

"Will you quit saying that? It's a chance we have to take."

"I love horses. I wouldn't hurt a horse. And it can run a sight faster than I can."

She lowered the glass, leaning on one elbow.

"You British! Crazy animal lovers. Feed a dog and starve a child."

"Nasty, nasty."

"Yes, it was. Sorry. But you make me so mad. You think we can use the horses?"

"Me—not we. I will give my well-known impersonation of the galloping major while you trip the light fantastic around t'other way."

"But if the approaches are booby-trapped, as we're sure they must be, you'll set them off. It's the very thing we want to avoid."

"Horses, ducky—horses will set 'em off. So if you set any off, they'll think it's another horse. By the time they find out, you'll be through the alarm system."

"You'll draw them to you."

"I shall be expecting them. They won't be expecting me."

"How do you get around to the stables?"

"Goat's milk—very nourishing," said Mark. "Make yogurt from it. Marvellous stuff. Makes you live to a hundred and ten. And goats live on old chop sticks and bubble gum."

"What are you burbling about?"

"Behind the stables, in the shade of them now, no doubt; but last time I spied, I saw a li'l white goatee beard. Where there's goats there are no booby traps, so I hike me around yonder, do a spot of belly crawl down that side and, at a synchronized time—bingo!" He rested his head in the crook of his arm and tilted his hat over his face. "Call me at eighteen hundred hours, mother dear, for I long to be Queen of the May."

"Queen is right," April snarled. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Stop yapping," said Mark. "Do your knitting—or something."

He snored into a quivering silence.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THEY'RE ALL YOURS!

A SHREDDED canopy of silver and black lay over the valley and hills of Little Basin. The moon rode the hills, rimming them with light.

Earlier, in the sunset's flare, the message "Let's go" had flashed into the sky. They waited until a smoky-purple haze rippled beneath the early stars, then became two swift, soft- moving figures. Their track suits had been reversed—the underside being black with a pattern of zigzag purple stripes, giving an illusory effect of a moving shadow. Whereas all black is a stark outline in all but the deepest of shadows where the eyes cannot see, this coloring had an affinity with both full and half shadow. The pouch belts and shoulder attachments fitted natural body contours and did not rattle, reflect or protrude.

Mark swung wide around the fencing to come in at the far side, leaving April to enter at a point immediately opposite the swimming pool providing shortest access to the patio. Watches were synchronized for the time when each would don U.N.C.L.E. gas masks and make the first move according to the carefully assessed plan.

It was annoying not to be able to use even their personal ear radios. These could not be overheard, but ultra-sensitive equipment might reflect the signals. But April ceased to be annoyed at this when, as she waited by the fence, she saw one of the flower beds begin to move apart in the center. Moonlight on the bed gave her a clear view, despite the fact that this section of the fence was shadowed by the buildings.

From the gap there a pole began to rise, looking at first sight like a young fir tree. A faint whine of hydraulics, a slight hiss, and the pole stopped at about the thirty-feet height. Fan-shaped antennae "grew" from near its top. TV and radio booster aerials sprouted below these. Then at the very top a "soup-dish" radar bowl came up like a conjuror's bunch of flowers that appear out of his sleeve, springing open to assume its correct shape.

April goggled at it. "I sure hope lover boy sees this," she muttered. "With that mast they could monitor my grumbling appendix."

Mark certainly saw it—from under the belly of a goat as he inched across a patch of moonlight towards the shadow of the stables. Reaching this shelter he checked his watch, to find he had time in hand. He surveyed the mast. "Take a look at that, me old darling!" he whispered. "I reckon the C.I.A. or the F.B.I. boys made a shrewd guess about the electronic potential around here."

He was about to break open the lock on the stables' main door when a couple of goats ambled past him, having come through the hole he had made in the fence. Ignoring him, they went on across the stable yard, over a grass patch and along the path curving around the house.

"Ye gods! A goat radar, no less! Well, thanks a lot!" He drew his gas gun and followed them. No booby traps. He was at the corner of the house when he saw his mistake. By a reflection of moonlight as a goat passed it, the glassy eye of a photocell set amid some wall greenery betrayed its presence.

Mark dropped to one knee, eyes keened for more photocells. There should be a pattern of them to identify the size of objects caught in their beam. He saw the next highest; then saw something else. The window nearest to him was curtained by a sheet of the metal material and was stretched across the inside frame. A tiny chink of yellow light showed at one corner; otherwise the window reflected only moonlight.

Crouching to keep his body at the same height as the animals, he followed the goats around the path. He was nearly caught when a door opened. He heard the snick of the catch, darted close to the house wall, dropped flat. No light flowed from the open door, but the man there was clearly etched against the sky. Even his gun was in sharp relief. He swore in a guttural voice. "These goddamn goats are loose again. That's all it was. Cut out the scanners and send Longess out to round them up." The door closed.

Mark exhaled slowly. "Scanners too!" He blew a kiss towards the goats, who now were scoffing flowers from the large bed in which the aerial mast was set. "I'll never call you 'stinkers' again!" He eased upright, then sped on soundless feet across the front of the house, around the patio, and up the side of the pool. He took a chance that April was there and leapt for the patch of shadows. She almost rammed the gas gun nozzle into his ear.

"Some horse!" she whispered from under her mask.

"Some break! The goats got loose. I didn't need the horses. No booby traps, darling—just masses of cells and scanners. They've switched off until—ah, here be is! Wait here!" A man had come out from this end of the house.

Shadow leaping, silent—a swift pad-pad of feet balancing, body poised, arms reaching.

The man halted, swung around, mouth open. Eyeballs white, wild against the moonlight, glazing fast as flexed-steel hands struck once, twice. The senseless figure crumpled. Human sack among the flowers. The goats went on eating.

April anticipated the next move. A small side door was open. Mark joined her. They stepped inside, closed the door softly. A lobby, Spanish style, wall benches, hooks, overalls hanging. Riding boots, sand-yellow, a straw sombrero, the smell of garlic. Then a door, light-glow slanting through. She tiptoed past him, peered, backed up, signaled three. He nodded. They went in.

A large kitchen, fitted ranch-style, split level. Three men, cards on a plastic-topped table, were there smoking, waiting for the fourth, now sleeping among the flowers. Two were big men, one small, and they scarcely glanced up as Mark sat in the fourth chair.

"Took you long..." said one man, and broke off as the gas gun hissed.

They reared up, puking, gasping, mouths working at words which were strangled at source, then sank to the floor like jelly-babies, in all shapes.

April caught the smallest man and eased him on to the floor, steadying the tilting chair before it crashed. Mark slammed the other two over the table, patted their clothes, and drew out two guns. April bad already taken the third. She took the two from Mark, went across to the stove, and lifted a stew-pot lid. Steam eddied up. She dropped

the gun inside, replaced the lid, and came back, eyes smiling.

There was a short passage before them now, high-ceilinged, one wall a whole mural, a desert scene glowing with light. On the other wall were crossed sabers, an old muzzle-loader rifle, a board with Spanish daggers akimbo. And along the pine floor was a long, narrow Jacobean antique linen chest. Mojave rugs lead to a ghastly pseudo-Moroccan archway, draped with an Indian blanket.

Beyond the drape was a large oval room, aseptic in its clinical lay-out, a ghost room, silvered with moonlight from huge picture windows. It had sound-absorbing tiles from floor to ceiling. Fluted air-conditioning vents pulsed sibilantly, loud in the emptiness, invalid chairs, their tubular chrome glistening, stood headstoning the long white graves of massage couches. There were white leather lounge chairs, canopied sun chairs, tall spindly chairs, all mocking an empty curving bar. This was the hub of the nut hatch, thought Mark. Yes indeedee.

He noticed two white doors, smooth, all smooth, with no handles, no locks, no hinges. They set to work methodically, but fast, training, experience, knowledge culled from a thousand minutes, compressed and drawn on in less than five. System, mechanism, alarms. Contacts, method, effect.

Mark made signs, not daring to use personal radios, and drew out his U.N.C.L.E. device, held it, questioning. April nodded agreement, took her cigarette lighter, adjusted it into a cutting torch. Mark traced the hair-wires, separated them, clipped on the device to one, then spat on his fingers and arced the wires. Blue light danced from finger-tip to device. A puff of white smoke, a tiny "phut"—and the alarm circuit was broken.

The torch flame burned blue-white, following the line of the alarm wires into the door post, burning deep, clean, through steel contact plate. Paint blistered in a small halo. Mark came around April, to place the palms of his hands hard on the smooth door surface, each palm holding a suction pad. The torch flame died. The blistered halo glowed half an orange bubbling, then slowly dulled to a bruise blue. The door jerked, beginning to whip back on its glides. Mark held it, saving the crashing thud when it would have hit the stops.

At the same time this action allowed an aperture for their vision and April peered through. There was a danger sign. Four—no, five—men. Noise now, too, booming out into the ghostly room. Voices, voices, voices—jabbering, murmuring; static crackling, F.M. waves pulsing

sound. Mark now controlled the door with one hand, the first release impulse having gone, his head pressed against hers.

In their fan of vision stretched part of a console: TV screens, radio and radar dials, switches, colored lights. Above the console was a light-glowed map—not contoured—a linking chart of all major towns, many smaller but important centers, with Washington D.C. as the radial heart. Next in size of markings came New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, and an outer perimeter of symbols linking these with the main points.

There was to be no wrecking—that had been a clear order, and a difficult order too; for this meant having to attack personnel only. C.I.A. and F.B.I. boffins must have clued on to this fantastic desert set-up, perhaps not too hard a task, once the area had been hair-lined in their checking sights. Yet it was the sort of thing that could go undetected for a long time until someone broke through to beam the concentrated forces of detection upon it.

It would be simple then to make a frontal assault—a press of men, a blaze of guns, a few grenades even—and all this pretty-pretty, grimly efficient center would go... kerump!

Then they would have to piece it all together again to find out how the place ticked and why, and how the hell all this could be assembled and operated under, or nearly under, a lot of noses. Still, Mark sighed, no wrecking; just seal off the area and shut out all the highly efficient communication aids.

Keep the finger off the button, he thought grimly. Don't call us—we'll call you. And two of them were valiant. Two volunteers—you and you! Heads close, turning, eyes gazing through the mask visors. Clear and steady, a glint of the buccaneer, a flash of the bright high spirit. Ready when you are. A reaction gaze—okay, here we go!

They went in—guns hissing. Three of the four men inside went staggering out, crumpling cold. Then the gas guns were empty. April and Mark leapt, silent, ruthlessly slashing.

One—a big man—half gassed, flung out his hand towards along, slim red lever at the right of the console. April swung her body, throat-chopped, then saw the danger. Her supple hands locked on to the reaching fingers, spread them upward and back, tiny bones snapping with a twig-like sound; then the man's arm was whipped up, his shoulder socket wrenched out. As he spun away, a slashing blow

across the nape of the neck dropped his head down against the steel of a tubular chair.

Mark's victim was the man who had come out of the door—short, powerful, with ape arms, thick-chested, a mauler-fighter, his gun half-clear of its holster. He almost went down under Mark's attack, recovered, whirled, and snatched up a metal bar—one of several leaning in a corner, slotted bars which were part of some sort of frame. Mark anticipated a swing, but it didn't come that way. The man hunched and lunged the end of the steel bar into Mark's guts.

April turned as Mark sagged and the bar was swinging up to crash down upon his skull. She fired almost before she stopped turning. The bullet smashed into the man's wrist. The bar dropped on his shoulder, bounced to the floor.

Mark, retching, full of pain, rolled to one knee, hand clawing for his gun. He fired upward. The bullet went into the man's open mouth and out the top of his head. He slammed back, to fall on the stack of bars in the corner.

April saw the danger as Mark's hand tried to free his mask. Urgently, close to his ear, she said: "This way—hold on to me." She helped him past the huddled figures to the door at the far end, opened it, and pulled and pushed him into the lobby, then flung open the front door. Sweet night air flowed in as Mark flopped to the porch, ripping off his mask. He was violently sick. April pulled off her own mask, sucking in the air gratefully.

Recovering at last, he said huskily: "Thanks."

"Yes," she said. "Thanks."

He grinned, white teeth in a white mask of face.

"No wrecking? Not including us!"

She smiled. "So the man said."

"Better shut the door—or that inner one. Light can be seen."

They went inside for the air had already helped the air-conditioning to clear the gas.

"Well, well!" said April. "Will you lookee here!"

"Bonanza! Very grand!" Recovering swiftly now, he went along the console, closely inspecting all its parts. "Luck we've had, me old darling—you see?"

April nodded. "I just saw. Two cameras—for relaying operators' image to waiting multitude, no doubt—and obligingly switched off. These TV links must have taken years to set up."

"They can't see us," said Mark. "Can they hear us?" He checked again. "No, all incoming." He flicked tabs on the console. "This is Detroit standing by. This is New York standing by. This is Los Angeles standing by." The voices went on and on.

April said: "Tapes. An answering service in reverse."

"Could be. In fact is. Clever girl! While the tapes run they know the circuit is okay and the spray outfits are ready. You read?"

She nodded. "Near enough. See the screens? All the main business sectors in each town on that colored chart."

"Remote-control cameras, ranging through forty-five degrees, but—what would you say?—six feet from street level?"

"Between four and six feet. That would be the spray height." She looked more closely at one. "You can't watch all screens at once. See this—see how the camera is lined on certain points of a street? Look—street signs, an awning over a club doorway, a street light."

"We could expect that," said Mark. He surveyed the room more closely. "But this can't be all. It's the main control, but there are no screens relaying the magic-eye alarm system outside here."

"No, Mr. Slate," said a familiar voice through a hidden speaker. "You are quite right. Do come in."

The floor suddenly slid from under them. They fell on their sides and were jostled along a few feet before they plunged down, to bounce jarringly on a wrestling mat eight feet below.

Dr. Karadin, a large swarthy man and four metal-suited figures were grouped around them.

"Good evening," said Karadin. "What a terrible nuisance you two are!" He turned to the swarthy man. "Now, Mr. Sirdar, they are all yours. Let us have no more mistakes." He walked away to steps lowered from

the roof and climbed up to the control room.

CHAPTER TWELVE: RESOLVEMENT

THEY were in an oval room, low-ceilinged, not large, with five doorless openings leading from it. There was a glimpse of several short passages curving away in different directions.

Sirdar left the four metal-clad men to do the muscle work. All were big and knew their job. If only there had been one each, April and Mark would have taken a chance. As it was, they daren't risk an offensive.

"To the lay-in." Sirdar strode off. The men hustled their captives into a passage, post two rooms containing bunk beds, ending in a narrow room with coffins stacked around the walls, a plinth in the center.

Sirdar took a coffin, lifting it like it was a matchbox, measured it against Mark, then laid it on the plinth. He took another to April, measured and placed it next to that. While the men held them captive, Sirdar stripped off belts and packs, and tossed these against the wall. From a shelf he took two rolls of muslin. He worked fast and expertly, winding the muslin tight around their bodies from shoulders to ankles. After he'd fixed the last tie of muslin he gave a signal. The men stepped back.

April and Mark began to sway, off-balance, unable to move their feet. Sirdar laughed as he put one massive hand around each of their throats. He rocked them back and forth like mummified dolls.

"Ah no! No mistakes this time, eh?" He looked at April. "Sirdar is patient. Sirdar waits for his time. Now it comes. Once, you defect Sirdar because he does not believe any woman could be so quick and strong. So this time I make no mistake." He shrugged. "Is a pity. With you I could have had fun. My men also. But—what is one woman?" He held Mark at arm's length, drew April close to him, kissed her full on the lips. Then he jerked back with a howl of pain, thrusting her away. She fell against one of the men, who caught and held her.

She had bitten clean through Sirdar's lower lip. Blood spouted over his chin, reddening his shirt. He rushed at her, fists clenched. Released from the throat-hold and now mastering the trick of balancing, Mark raised himself to his toes and launched forward, inclining his head so

that it struck Sirdar's temple with all the force he could achieve.

In fact, Sirdar ran into the blow, thus making the impact more severe. Lights exploded behind Mark's eyes. Blackness swam in front of them. His last thought was: "Ye gods—I've knocked myself cold!" He couldn't see, and didn't know, that Sirdar went down like a pole-axed bullock, also out cold. The next Mark saw as he came to was the ceiling, rough-plastered, mauve in the fluorescent lighting, and wooden walls on each side of him.

A man's face peered down at him.

"You awake, eh? Man, you got plenty trouble! Before this you die quick. Now you die real slow. You make Sirdar one sick man. You split his head open and the she-cat split his lip open. Man, you better pray because when Sirdar recovers, you are for a little grave under the hot sun in an open coffin for the ants to eat you and the birds to peck at your eyes!"

Mark's head felt it was splitting under the hammer blows of a throbbing ache. The light was painful. He closed his eyes and felt better.

"You would not have the stomach to watch me die," he said, having glimpsed the half-fear, half-arrogance in the man's eyes.

The voice laughed jerkily. "Me? No, I admit it. But I will not have to. Soon I will be gone from here. It is your stomach that will have the fear."

April's voice said: "Thanks, darling. You gave the temporal blow almost to perfection. A half an inch to the right and you'd have killed the big swine. They had to carry him out, though. Are you okay?"

"Your voice is an alka-seltzer, me old darling."

"Well, fizz you too—what a compliment!"

"Crazy, you are," said the man. "In your coffins, yet you can make the jokes."

"Hey, gorgeous!" April called. "How come these coffins? You expecting a bunch of zombies?"

"These are from the old days when sick people came here. Sometimes we had to ship their bodies back to their own country. Sometimes we

bury them here."

Mark said: "How would you like ten thousand dollars, friend?"

The man chuckled. "Me? I have ten thousand dollars. You offer the bribe, yes? Don't be silly. If you have a million dollars you do not bribe me. It is worth nothing. In a few days—nothing at all. Now—if you have ten thousand *esparas*, that would mean something."

"And to think I had my hands on hundreds of thousands of them!" said Mark.

"You did? You have seen our new *esparas* currency?"

"Certainly I have. Very pretty too."

"How do you see them?" The man's face again peered down into Mark's coffin. "We see only pictures of them. How do you see them?"

"In France—a place where they printed them. We blew it up after we cleaned out the *esparas*."

"Ah! Yes, a plant was blown up—this I heard. You still have the *esparas*?"

"We still have them. Not here, of course, but we've got 'em right enough."

"Make it twenty thousand," said April. "All you need to do is to slit this muslin on me, leave me the knife and forget to collect our gear from over by the wall before you leave."

"It is tempting. It needs thinking about. With twenty thousand *esparas* I could live like a millionaire. An *esparas* will be worth fifty dollars." He obviously was pacing around the plinth, for they could hear his feet thumping. "But—how do I get paid?"

At that moment a repeater alarm began to sound. They could hear its echo, or some other amplifier, relaying its call. The man's face appeared over the coffins.

"We all must obey that call. It means there are more intruders." He grinned lopsidedly. "Don't go away—I'll be back. My name is Mindano —Josef Mindano. Maybe we work something out."

"Sure, Jo," said April. "We'll lie around and wait for you.',

"I like you," said Josef. "You are fun—and so pretty."

He disappeared. They heard his footsteps pounding away.

"One of us," said April slowly, "one of us is going to have to think up a good line to feed our Josef, else I'm going to become a dead mummy before I've had a chance to become a live one."

"Chance, me old darling, is something of which you've had nothing else but," said Mark, equally slowly. "it's taking them that makes mummies."

"If you live," said April, "they won't retire you—they'll put you out to stud."

"A horse of my acquaintance tells me it's a wonderful life. All the vitamins you need and a field full of fillies." He paused. "April, darling—you are a lovely, sweet piece."

A short silence. "And you're a swashbuckling dog."

Mark sighed. "Heigh-ho! I suppose this is the nearest I'll ever get to being next to you in compromising circumstances."

"Yes," she said. "It can't be much fun for mummies."

In the silence which followed they heard the soft swish-pad of slithering footsteps coming towards them. These halted somewhere beyond the coffins. There were rustling movements and a gasp.

"Hi, Jo!" April called softly. "Is that you?"

Quick, pattering footsteps; then a face peering down at them.

"Oh, Jimmy!" said Randy Kovac. "So there you are!"

"I won't ask it," said April, adding swiftly: "Knife—fast. Come on, Randy—move!"

Randy moved, slit the lower folds, then up one side. April's hand appeared. "Okay, give it me. Go and unwind Mark. Pull out the underfold around his ankles."

Mark raised his legs. Randy worked feverishly at unwinding the muslin. April got free and began slitting the muslin from the top. At last they climbed to the floor. Mark swayed a little, head buzzing, but this soon cleared.

"Gear!" he snapped. "They didn't have time to tamper with it."

They fitted it on, drew their U.N.C.L.E. guns, gave Randy a small automatic for his own protection, then stood at a vantage point near the opening.

"Okay, hero!" said April to Randy. "Now talk. How?"

Randy gulped. "Mr. Waverly told me I could go with some of the C.I.A. men in one of the encirclement cars—just for experience in field work and to see how an incident is escalated into a resolvement…"

"Oh Gawd!" Mark interrupted. "Spare us the Pentagon prattle. You're here—how?"

Randy grinned. "They didn't want me. I didn't want them. I took to the hills. I knew your position." He hesitated. "You weren't really smooching, were you?"

"Peeping Tom!" April exclaimed. "You were it!"

"Not peeping—honest."

"Okay, honest. So?"

"I saw a woman—back of the ridge. Sneaked up on her hideout. She must have been there for weeks. A cave stocked with stuff. There's a sort of crack in the hills over that side."

"A fissure," said Mark. "Let's be correct. We know it."

"It's a way down," said Randy.

"Dammit, there usually is in a great crack!"

Randy grew brisk again. "You mean fissure."

Mark raised a fist. "In your head if you don't get on."

"Under an overhang—another cave. The other side of the fissure a track wide enough to take a small car. Inside the cave, a doorway into a passage. Very steep, then levels out. Rooms lead off it—rooms like this. Some well furnished. One is a monitoring room. Screens show all the garden, every part of the house. A big room next, with almost empty racks and hangers. A few metal suits and some containers still left."

"Their stockpile," said April. "And they've distributed it. Anything else?"

"Passageways to this end. I kept ducking in and out. I think I set off an alarm."

"He *thinks*!" said Mark, then grinned. "We thank you. How many men?"

"Ooh, dozens!"

"Well, thank you again!"

"They've gone. They went hours ago by that fissure cave."

"They'll have been collected by now," said April.

"There's a big man groaning in a room with four beds. And one or two others roaming about the passages," said Randy. "I hid under one of the bunks until they'd gone. Then I came into this part and heard your voices."

"Story ends," said Mark. "We now clean up Sirdar and his top boyos, and"—he grinned again—"I think we could escalate this to a resolvement, don't you?"

"That woman bothers me," said April. "Who? And why? You think she comes in here?"

"Oh yes," said Randy. "I watched her go in and come out."

"But she doesn't set off an alarm when *she* comes in?"

Randy shrugged. "I needn't have, if I'd been more clever. They're only a few trip wires and a couple of photocells. I ducked under the cells."

"She may be just a good friend," said Mark. "A sort of electronic camp follower."

"I doubt it," said April. "Knowing how Karadin feels about women, he wouldn't stand for any female hanging around here. And if she was attached to him, there'd be a room for her—not a cave." She looked at Randy. "Keep back of us, and watch how you use that gun. You can use one?"

"Oh yes; I'm a pot shot."

"There ain't no pots," said Mark. "Just people—so watch it, William

Tell. Ready, April, me old—hmm—mate?"

"Yus, mate!" April grinned, mimicking his London accent.

They moved out of the coffin room. Mark was ahead of them. Sirdar—a cloth pressed to his head but a leveled gun in his hand—lumbered out of a passageway. The bark of his gun was merged with the "spat-spat" of the U.N.C.L.E. gun. Sirdar staggered, hit the wall, the gun lowered as he slid down—his other hand, strangely, still pressed to his wounded head.

Mark felt warm blood oozing down his neck. He had swayed and fired in a lightning reflex action. Sirdar's bullet had wanged his ear. Another inch... "Messy but marvelous," said Mark. "Press on."

April dashed ahead. A man in a metal suit loomed out of a doorway. She tangled with him fiercely, dropping him part to his knees. As she gun-butted him, Mark leapt past her. Two men came pounding along a passage to his right. Guns crashed. Stone chippings spattered. The two men, flung back, fell, then lay still.

As Mark watched them, another man came stealthily from a left-side passage. His gun was leveled. April and Randy saw the danger at the same time, but she couldn't fire, for the awkward angle meant that she might hit Mark. All in this split second, Randy took the most difficult decision of his young life. To be swift to kill? To be cool to cripple? He aimed, squeezing the trigger. The gun leapt out of the man's hand, and spun away. Mark whirled, and his gun butt crashed down. Poor old Jo!

April said: "Right—this is it. Cover me in case there are any more." She pulled out the U.N.CL.E. communicator. "Channel D. April Dancer. Mark Slate. Hear this! Hear this! Close in. Repeat—close in. We are in basement. Karadin isolated. Am going to trap him. Nothing is wrecked. Keep it that way, huh? Message ends—out."

Mark said: "Trap?" He and Randy followed her to the monitoring room. She waved them to remain outside and be silent.

Inside, she searched for the correct keys and switches, adjusting the camera to cover herself. The screen flickered and Dr. Karadin's head and shoulders appeared. Amazement spread over his face. But April kept the gun out of sight.

"Be merciful, Dr. Karadin. There are dead men down here, and I am afraid. I cannot get out." She smiled sadly. "You are still the master."

"Dead men? Who is dead? That fool, Sirdar!"

"He's dead too. I am sick and afraid. Are you so ruthless that you would destroy me too?"

His expression changed. "Ruthless? Others are ruthless with me. Perhaps I too am sick and afraid? But we each walk into our own hell, Miss Dancer." He shrugged. "All right—I will come down to you. But I shall have to keep you prisoner. You understand?"

"Anything you say."

"Wait," he said, and moved from the screen.

April reached over and moved a control which swiveled the upstairs camera. She saw Karadin press a button and stand aside for the trap floor to open, then went swiftly into the passage.

"Corny, but effective." Mark grinned.

"You were wonderful!" said Randy, eyes glowing.

"No mistakes now," said April. "We let him get clear of the steps—part-way here—then take him. Go now—out of sight."

He came slowly off the ladder and walked towards her as she stood in the passage opening. Then suddenly he was not looking at her, for his gaze, wide and startled, was directed to a passage which opened to her left.

"*Mon Dieu*! Mimi! No—no— Mimi!"

His hand flashed to his pocket. The gun was halfway out when the woman fired. She kept firing until her gun was empty. She threw the gun wildly away from her. It hit Randy on the shin. He yelped. She turned.

"The young man on the hill," she said in a deep, warm voice. "So you found my cave?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Mark and April were bending over Dr. Karadin. Mark shook his head. "At least two bullets could have killed him instantly. One in the head, one in the heart."

April stood up slowly.

"Mimi!" she said softly. "Yes, of course. Mimi Karadin."

The woman smiled. She was tall, well formed, with a sad face, steady eyes, soft dark hair graying. Poised, quiet, no hysterics. An air of resignation, or was it—resolvement?

"I set him up for you, Mimi," said April. "I made it possible."

"No," she said. "Just the time—it didn't matter when. I could have done it a dozen times before. But it had to be just before his great moment. He denied me, you see. He denied me my own daughter. He denied me love and life—everything—for this—this fanaticism. So I was to deny him too. Deny him success, recognition, fortune, world power—all the myths for which he's spent his life searching."

"He was about two minutes off hearing he had failed," said Mark.

She shook her head slowly from side to side.

"Oh no, that would never do. He had to die believing he was on the verge of success—as once I was." She raised her left hand. The fingers were withered and crooked. "I was his wife, the mother of his child. They called me a great violinist. The night before my debut at the Albert Hall in London, he plunged this hand into a solution of what you may know as K.S.R.6."

"Oh no!" April breathed.

"Oh yes. He could not bear my success, so he took it from me. When, for a time, I lost my reason, he took my child." She walked over to stand over the body and spat. "*Au 'voir*, Carl!"

Men came rushing down the steps. April looked at Mark. He smiled gently.

"Resolvement, me old darling."

She blinked back her tears.

"The hell with it! she said.

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